ARL™ NEWS

The Power of One

By Isabel Rimanóczy

A recent issue of Fortune (Nov.18, 2002) was dedicated to "today's embattled chief executives". In what I considered a 'collector's issue', they reviewed the American history of authority, power and behaviors of corporate presidents - later called chief executive officers.

As you might guess, this was triggered by the unfortunate events of the last several months when many prestigious executives ended up on trial or charged for corruption. The central theme was how corporate leaders "went from heroes to goats"… and may be back again, but lost the people's trust on that way.

The dramatic side of this seems to be the idea that thousands of people's destinies, savings, jobs, security – depend on the behavior of a few. Ordinary people like us have to trust these corporate leaders will behave ethically and responsibly, and that the regulatory and judicial processes will protect us from any harm. However, as we have recently seen, this kind of protection may arrive all too late.

This is not too different from other scenarios. There are always more powerful people than ourselves making decisions that have an impact on us – from the teacher at our kid's school to the national president.

These reflections have been inspired by what we can personally do to influence the corporations we work for, the teams we lead and the communities we live in. At the November meeting of our South Florida OD Network the entire session was dedicated to what HR and OD professionals can contribute to develop high performing organizations. As many of our readers are HR/OD professionals, I want to share our findings.

We began by addressing these questions: ***What do we mean by a high performing organization? How do we know it when it happens? What are the visible signs of corporate high performance?***

Through individual reflection and dialogue on their own experiences, the group came up with the following indicators:

From an Organizational Perspective:

- Shared visions and goals are clearly articulated
- Value is visible throughout the system
- The structure supports desired behaviors and values
- A foundation of trust supports open conversations
- The organization is charitable and involved in the community
- It is environmentally responsible
- There is respect across the workplace
- Employees are enthusiastic, happy and love to come to work
- Employees feel appreciated
- Events are celebrated
- Innovation, creativity, flexibility and learning are a part of the culture

From a Business Perspective:

- Customers value the products and services
- Profit targets are achieved
- There is low employee turnover
- Performance is managed around clear goals, objectives and metrics

From the Leadership Perspective:

- Good leadership is visible at all levels
- Top management behavior is consistent with stated values and goals
- Leaders develop others by providing meaningful work experiences

From the Team Perspective:

- Teamwork is encouraged
- Leadership is shared
- Effective networks are formed

From the Professional Perspective:

- Individual talent is recognized and rewarded
- Professional development is encouraged
- Rewards are based on performance that is measured
- Employees ideas are valued and challenged

Based upon this common understanding we addressed the central question:

What questions should we consider in building high performance organizations? The questions
we identified can be organized into the following categories:

Organizational:

- → Is the real purpose of the organization clearly communicated to all?
- → Does our values statement reflect the values that guide daily behaviors?
- → Has the vision been collectively developed?

- → What are the gaps between the current reality and desired culture?
- → Do we have quality processes?
- → What do our internal clients expect from us (HR/OD)?
- → What do our stakeholders think about the organization?
- → Are our practices and processes aligned with our goals and rewards?
- → Are we involving people in problem solving and decision making?
- → Do we offer a flexible work environment?
- → How can we better contribute to our local and global communities?

Professional Development:

- → Do we have a good recruitment and hiring process?
- → Do employees participate in choosing their own supervisors?
- → Are we committed to learning?
- → Do we reward new ideas? Do we tolerate mistakes?
- → Do we have an inventory of people's strengths and interests? Is it used?
- → Do we encourage professional and personal development?
- → Do we foster self learning and exchange of lessons?
- → Do we have clear and practical performance management systems?
- → Do we offer individual coaching to support change of behaviors?
- → Do we offer coaching skills training to improve day to day relationships?
- → Do we have environments conducive to reflection and dialogue?
- → How do we collect organizational knowledge?

Leadership Practice:

- → Is our Executive Team explicit about their expectations and support?
- → Is our leadership development systemic and in tune with the business?
- → Do we honor and acknowledge those who "walk the talk"?
- → Do we sanction those who don't?
- → Do we encourage role and reward modeling?

Each of these questions is meant to help you reflect on your own challenges and opportunities. If some of them inspire you, do a 'Stop-Reflect-Write' and surprise yourself with the simple ideas you will come up with. Then act. **This is the power of one.**

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