

# WE NEED CONNECTION!

BY WES FRIESEN

As I write this, our country is in the midst of witnessing a record number of people leaving their jobs, a phenomenon dubbed “The Great Resignation.” To be employers of choice, we need to actively provide a culture that will help attract and retain quality team members. One thing that people universally crave is to feel connected to others with whom they work. Dr. Dean Ornish speaks to this by saying, “The need for connection and community is primal, as fundamental as the need for air, water, and food.”

Michael Stallard has written a great book entitled *Connection Culture*. He and his team have identified three types of work cultures:

**Culture of Control:** This culture is marked by people with power ruling over others.

**Culture of Indifference:** People are so busy with tasks that they fail to invest time to develop healthy, supportive relationships. People are treated as mere means to an end rather than human beings who are valuable in and of themselves.

**Culture of Connection:** This culture intentionally develops both task AND relationship excellence. People care about others and care about the work because it benefits other human beings. This is the culture I want to lead and be part of — what about you? The importance of being socially connected to others cannot be overstated. The sad news is that in recent surveys, over 60% of adults report being lonely, and depression and harmful addictions are at all-time highs. In contrast, research has shown numerous benefits from connection with others, including:

- ▶ 50% reduced rate of early death
- ▶ Improved physical, emotional, and mental health
- ▶ Higher productivity, higher quality work, better customer service, fewer accidents, lower absenteeism

How can we build strong connections with people and reap the benefits for them and the teams and stakeholders (investors, customers, and employees) we serve?

## 10 Principles to Connect with People Well

**1. Commit to connect.** The starting place for developing stronger connections with people is to make a conscious choice to do so. Do you really want to connect better? If yes, commit to taking intentional steps to build deeper connections. The other principles will give you ideas to consider.

**2. Develop a genuine care for people.** We can only connect well with people when we value and care for them. We need to not take people for granted and let them know we care and appreciate them. Valerie Elster reminds us that, “Expressing gratitude is a natural state of being and reminds us that we are all connected.”

Every person is important, as Bill McCartney emphasizes when he says, “Anytime you devalue people, you question God’s creation of them.” Part of caring for people is to be honest, genuine, and transparent. Let people see our hearts of caring and compassion — and they will respond and feel closer to us. One of my often-used quotes is, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Caring includes intentionally working on helping meet the seven workplace needs that experts have identified: respect, recognition, belonging, autonomy, personal growth, meaning, and progress. We also need to develop the ability to empathize — mutual empathy is a powerful connector that is made possible by mirror neurons in our brains.

**3. Be proactive — initiate movement towards them.** It’s tempting to sit back and let others try and connect with us. But, as leaders, we need to be proactive and take the initiative. Management experts Tom Peters and Nancy Austin concluded, “The number one managerial productivity problem in America is, quite simply, managers are out of touch with their people and out of touch with customers.”

**4. Look for common ground.** Probably my favorite leadership expert is John Maxwell. I agree with John when he says, “Anytime you want to connect with another person, start where both of you agree. And that means finding common ground.” There are lots of potential areas of common ground — ranging from personal interests to life experiences to values and beliefs. The key to finding common ground? Listening.

**5. Be a good listener.** Rachel Naomi Remen advises that, “The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.” I like the practical advice from Dale Carnegie (author of the classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People*) who said, “You can make more friends in two weeks by becoming a good listener than you can in two years trying to get other people interested in you.” Final tip: let’s be present in our conversations (engaged, interested, paying attention) keeping in mind the concept that “attention is the oxygen of relationships.”

**6. Recognize and respect differences.** While we should be looking to find common ground with others, we also need to acknowledge that we’re all different. Our differences and diversity make our lives more interesting and can strengthen our team performance as we blend our diverse backgrounds and abilities together to make us stronger.

**7. Share common experiences.** To really connect well with others, we need to find a way to cement the relationship. Joseph Newton said, "People are lonely (disconnected) because they build walls instead of bridges." To build bridges that connect you to people in a lasting way, share common experiences with them. Share meals. Go to a ball game or other events together. Take people to meetings with you. Participate on work projects together. For remote workers, creatively seek video-based fun activities such as online parties, games, etc. Anything we experience together helps create a common history and build connection.

**8. Get out of our physical and/or virtual office.** The reality is that there are increasing expectations on managers to produce more results with the same or fewer resources — and that can drive us into our offices to get our personal work done. But we need to intentionally carve out times to practice MBWA (Management by Walking Around) when working in physical work locations. And when working virtually, we need to intentionally have screen time with our team members. I have to admit that

I've not always been as consistent with touching base with people as I would like — how are you doing?

**9. Be a giver — provide help and share knowledge and resources.** Commit to being a servant leader who gives of oneself to help meet the needs of others. We can give of our time, knowledge, and resources to help people around us. Giving of ourselves is the ultimate win-win that benefits both the receiver and the giver. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." Anne Frank reminded us that, "No one has ever become poor by giving."

**10. Once connected, move forward.** There is value in building deeper connections with people just for relationship's sake. But there is even more value when we use our connections with people to add value to our team's key stakeholders and drive towards a better future. Someone once said, "Leadership is cultivating in people today a future willingness on their part to follow you into something new for the sake of something great." Connection helps create that willingness.

One more tip: remember to stay positive and remember the magical five to one ratio (to maximize relationships, we need to average at least five positive interactions for every one that is negative/constructive). Here is a closing quote from Michael Stallard: "Connection transforms a dog-eat-dog environment into a sled dog team that pulls together." ■

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# MEASURE WHAT MATTERS!

BY WES FRIESEN

Highly respected management guru Peter Drucker counseled, "What gets measured gets managed and improved." This speaks to the importance of carefully measuring only what really matters. We need to set and measure performance metrics that drive the results that are most important to our teams and the broader organization. Done well, our relevant performance measures can help improve the performance of our teams, inspire our team members, provide a common focus, and allow us to track progress. The end result we are pursuing is to select the right measures and set the right targets. Here are 10 guidelines that can help:

**1. Tie performance measures to organization objectives (aka goals).** Ideally, there are a few very important objectives that our teams are focused on supporting. An important concept is that, sometimes, "less is more." If we have too many measures, people get distracted, confused, and the most important measures can lose some focus. The key objectives define WHAT is to be achieved. Good objectives are significant, concrete, action-oriented, and ideally inspirational. Strategies and the associated performance measures benchmark and monitor HOW we get to the objective.

**2. Address stakeholder needs.** As objectives and performance measures are being developed, consider the "Right Questions" approach, which focuses on the critical few things by which to judge our performance results. Put ourselves in the shoes of our key stakeholders

(investors, customers, employees) and ask what is important to them.

We should develop "balanced" measures of success. Effective teams add value to all important stakeholders and avoid a singular focus (e.g., being low cost) to the detriment of other important outcomes (e.g., high quality). Following are potential types of measures to consider. For each measure that gets used, we should have a target to compare actual results against:

- ▶ Productivity (productivity is simply a measure of goods/services produced divided by resources used)
- ▶ Quality (e.g., reliability, accuracy, mistake-free, meets requirements, etc.)
- ▶ Volume (how much is being produced?)
- ▶ Timeliness (are work products completed when needed?)
- ▶ Service (are customers satisfied with the service they receive?)
- ▶ Compliance (are postal regulations, Sarbanes-Oxley, HIPAA, and other regulations being met?)
- ▶ Cost (e.g., measure overall costs and/or cost per unit)
- ▶ Safety (e.g., lost work days; OSHA recordables)
- ▶ Environmental (e.g., incidents)

**3) Solicit participation from your team members.** Leadership expert Warren Bennis counseled, "Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning." We should involve our team

members as much as we reasonably can. By doing so, we gain buy-in and will end up with a better quality result. I also like this quote from Steve Jobs: "We don't hire smart people to tell them what to do. We hire smart people so they can tell us what to do."

**4. Have some stretch in the performance measure targets.** Research has shown that it is important for targets to have some stretch, but at the same time be realistic. Specifically, research by Harvard University and the University of Michigan found that the degree of motivation and effort rises until the expectancy of success reaches 50%, then begins to fall. The key to maximize motivation, effort, and performance is to have targets that are neither too easy nor considered too hard (unrealistic) to attain.

**5. Avoid the activity trap.** Peter Drucker warned against what he called the "activity trap," which is focused on activity versus being focused on the end outputs. Drucker said, "Stressing output is the key to increasing productivity, while looking to increase activity can result in just the opposite."

**6. Seek measurable data.** Quality guru W. Edwards Deming famously quipped, "In God we trust; all others must bring data." As we define our relevant and important measures, it's advantageous to find ways to objectively measure our results whenever possible. That being said, keep in mind the Albert Einstein quote, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." There are times when a subjective assessment (e.g., evaluate on a scale of one to five) can make sense.

**7. Promote transparency.** We want to broadly share our targeted performance measures and our actual results with team members and others. Assuming our team members had input and buy-in to the measures, by broadly communicating, we promote accountability. We also have the potential to build a performance-minded culture where the concept of "success breeds success" thrives. Daniel Pink, author of *Drive*, speaks to this when he wrote: "The single greatest motivator is 'making progress in one's work.' The days that people make progress are the days they feel most motivated and engaged."

There are many different methods for sharing the actual results of our measures versus the targets. For example, we can

prepare hardcopy reports to distribute; display hardcopy posters or post on a bulletin board; provide electronic reports, digital dashboards, or displays; or any other means that resonates with our teams. We can communicate numbers and/or graphics, and consider color-coding results as red, yellow, and green. Whatever methods we choose, making time to discuss as a team is also essential to promote accountability and stimulate motivation and engagement.

**8. Stay flexible.** Reality, as we know, is that "life happens" in both our personal lives and in our business lives and worlds. When unexpected things happen (like a once-a-century global pandemic!), we need to be flexible in both our objectives and our related performance measures.

**9. Periodically evaluate and analyze.** Keeping our performance measures relevant is essential to maximize our value added to the organization and our key stakeholders. One tactic to maintain relevance is to periodically take time to evaluate how well the performance measures are contributing to the success of our teams and the broader organization. We should also periodically evaluate the reasonableness of the

targets, and our actual results against the targets. Since circumstances sometimes change, so should our measures and/or targets sometimes change.

**10. Integrate into a continuous performance management system.** John Doerr has written an excellent book called, *Measure What Matters*. I recommend the book for anybody that wants to go deeper on this topic of objectives and performance measures. One interesting approach that Doerr describes is continuous performance management. The main concept is that instead of only relying on annual performance reviews as has been customary, we should practice continuous performance management. The heart of this approach involves using CFRs:

**Conversations:** authentic, richly textured exchanges between manager and employee, aimed at driving performance.

**Feedback:** bidirectional feedback between manager and employee, and between peers, to evaluate performance progress and guide future improvement.

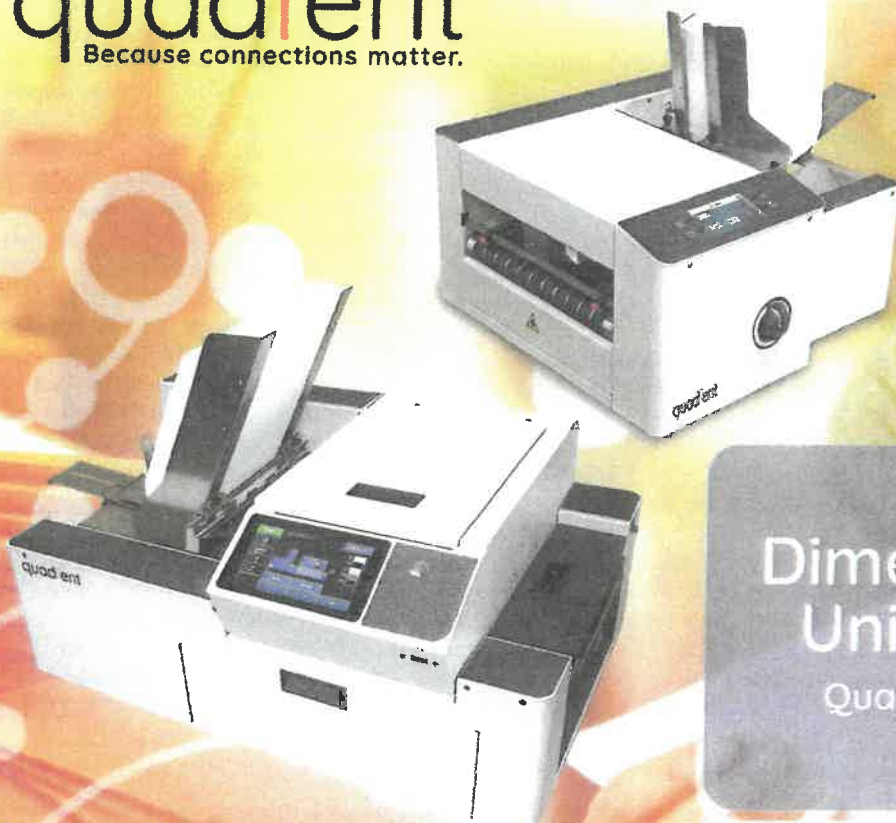
**Recognition:** expressions of appreciation to deserving individuals for contributions of all sizes.

Here is a closing quote from author Pearl Zhu, which summarizes the ideal performance measure: "Every measure selected should be part of a link of cause-and-effect relationships, and ultimately affect the growth and long-term perspectives of the organization." Let's measure what matters and reap the rewards to our teams and organization! ■

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# PEOPLE FIRST!

BY WES FRIESEN

Successful organizations add value to all of their major stakeholders including employees, customers, and investors. The best-led and most successful organizations and teams understand and prioritize putting their people (employees) first. What happens next? Virgin Group CEO Richard Branson explains by saying, "Clients (customers) do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your clients." When customers are treated well, they, in turn, bring their business and tell others, which results in healthy cash flow to benefit the stockholders and other investors. Bottom line: everybody benefits when people are put first!

Actions do speak louder than words. What are some actions that demonstrate and promote the "people first" philosophy? Here are 10 ideas that can help:

**1. Embrace and Practice Servant Leadership.** The most respected leadership experts in the world (e.g., Maxwell, Blanchard, Covey, etc.) promote the servant leadership philosophy, and the most successful leaders tend to practice it. In a nutshell, this leadership philosophy is about leaders being committed to serve team members and other people, contrasted with a traditional philosophy where leaders view others as there to serve the leader.

**2. Prioritize Employees.** With the labor shortages we are experiencing today, now, more than ever, people have choices regarding where to work. Recent surveys show that only 31% of people are engaged at work, 33% feel undervalued, and only 26% feel strongly valued. And the largest generation in the workforce today (Millennials) and the

generation coming behind them (Gen Z) have demonstrated they are very willing to change organizations if not treated positively. Anne Mulcahy was the respected and effective CEO for Xerox and understood the need to prioritize employees. Mulcahy once wrote, "Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person — not just an employee — are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability."

**3. Focus on Purpose and Meaning and Explain the Why.** We all want to feel like we are making a difference and are contributing towards building something important. Serving and adding value to the lives of others (e.g., customers, fellow employees) makes our work more than just earning a paycheck. Leadership expert Mark Babbitt observed, "Millennials and Gen Z are showing that what drives them is the desire for meaningful work, to balance work with life, and a focus more on making a difference than making money." We also need to explain the "why" behind our goals and strategies, which Simon Sinek elaborates on in his bestseller, *Start with Why*.

**4. Emphasize the Employee Experience and Employee Engagement.** Harold Schultz (founder and former CEO of Starbucks) once stated, "Treating employees benevolently shouldn't be viewed as an added cost that cuts into profits, but as a powerful energizer that can grow the enterprise into something far greater than one leader could envision." I agree and would suggest that intentionally spending time and money to create a better employee experience is well worth the investment.

Studies show that organizations with high employee engagement have fewer mistakes, higher productivity, lower absenteeism, and higher customer satisfaction.

One contributor to a positive employee experience is to provide as much flexibility in work schedules and work locations as possible. Not all jobs can allow some of the work to be done remotely, but when possible, enabling a hybrid schedule with some remote work is attractive to many. People also appreciate support for flexible schedules to help deal with childcare, elder care, and other personal responsibilities.

**5. Know Our People.** Our employees are not mere workers, but human beings with fears, dreams, aspirations, passions, and families. Let's get to know them (within reasonable bounds)! Asking open-ended questions and looking for opportunities to spend time with people outside of normal work hours can be helpful. Remember John Maxwell's famous quote, "People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care."

**6. Train, Build, and Grow Our People.** Peter Drucker counseled, "Every enterprise is a learning and teaching institution. Training and development must be built into it at all levels, and training and development never stop." We have many resources to tap into, including in-house training, university courses, conferences, professional associations, and more. Also, look for ways to align people with their strengths. For example, team members with strong verbal and social skills can be in customer-facing roles, while those with strong mechanical skills could operate equipment. Drucker explains this concept when he said, "A manager's task is to make the strengths of people effective and their weaknesses irrelevant."

**7. Simplify Accountability and Empower People.** We should explain and clarify expectations, then as much as possible let our people do their work without micromanaging them. Do you like to be micromanaged? Over the years, I have asked this question to literally a few thousand people, and have as yet had one person say they like to be micromanaged. Coaching and training when needed, yes, micromanaging, no.

**8. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.** Good communication starts with listening to what our people have to

say. There are many tools at our disposal to listen and communicate with our team members, including: regular one-on-one meetings, team meetings (via video conference for those working remotely), stay interviews (focused on employee satisfaction), team surveys (such as the Gallup 12), and pulse surveys (typically one question done frequently to gain a "pulse" on how employees are feeling; good for teams in multiple locations and those that don't have regular one-on-one and team meetings). As leaders, we need to transparently share information on how the team and overall organization are doing — surveys show that generally people most want to hear organization news from their immediate boss.

**9. Remove Obstacles.** How do we identify obstacles that are preventing our people from achieving their best? Ask them. Our goal is to identify the obstacles and then do what we can to remove them. In some cases, this will include providing better tools (e.g., upgraded equipment, better technology) so people can excel at what they do. In other cases, we may have cumbersome

and inefficient processes and systems that get in people's way. The great quality guru W. Edwards Deming once wrote, "Eighty-five percent of the reasons for failure are deficiencies in the systems and processes rather than the employee. The role of management is to change the processes rather than badgering individuals to do better."

**10. Practice the 3 Rs – Recognize, Respect, and Reward.** Prominent psychologist William James, after years of research, concluded that the greatest need people have is the need to be appreciated. Lasting success in the business world starts with appreciating and recognizing the people that do the work and interact with our customers. David Novak (former CEO of Yum! Brands) speaks to this when he said, "People leave when they don't feel appreciated. That's why we've made recognition a really high value. Our business is people-capability first; then you satisfy customers; then you make money."

I advocate for what I call the "3 Rs" approach for treating people on our teams: **recognize** people for who they

are and how they add value; always treat others with **respect**; and **reward** positive individual and team performance in ways that are meaningful to them. We need to look for opportunities to celebrate accomplishments.

Here is a final thought: Find your team's true purpose. Articulate it. Put people first. The rest will fall into place. ■

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# CREATING A CULTURE OF CARING

BY WES FRIESEN

A recent survey found that 44% of workers are looking for a new job. There are now two job openings for every person seeking a job, and Baby Boomers are retiring at the rate of 10,000 per day. Gallup surveys show only about 31% of workers are engaged at work. Wow! Human Resource executives say that the attraction and retention of engaged employees is the number-one challenge they face. What can be done to attract, retain, and engage the people we need to be successful? One important strategy is to intentionally strive to create a culture of caring.

Research and surveys have identified several benefits to having a culture of caring, such as:

- ▶ Increased productivity
- ▶ Higher engagement, job satisfaction, and motivation
- ▶ Improved workplace connections and sense of community
- ▶ Lower absenteeism and workplace stress
- ▶ Higher trust of employers
- ▶ Competitive advantage, including lower turnover rates and being an employer of choice

## Tips to Create a Culture of Caring

**1. Show You Care.** As leaders, we need to show that we care and model the attitude and behaviors we hope to see on our teams. There is an important concept called "shadow of the leader;" people are watching us to see what example we are setting. To create a deeper culture of caring, we need to model and show the way. I resonate with CEO Anne Wojcicki,

who said, "The reality is that the only way change comes is when you lead by example." A quote I use frequently is, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

We can show we care with our words and with our actions, such as performing thoughtful gestures like sending emails, texts, cards, or notes to our teammates when they perform well or face a difficult situation. We can surprise our team with bringing in ice cream bars on a hot afternoon, or sending people home early on a Friday afternoon after a busy week — the potential ideas are endless.

## 2. Demonstrate Compassion and Empathy.

We have a huge impact on how our team members feel. One brain-imaging study found when employees recalled a boss that had been unkind, they showed increased activation in areas of the brain associated with avoidance and negative emotion, while the opposite was true when they recalled an empathic boss. Researchers at the University of Michigan suggest that leaders who demonstrate compassion toward employees foster individual and collective resilience in challenging times (like we live in now!). Showing compassion to others is good for them and for us, as this quote from the Dalai Lama suggests: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

**3. Get to Know Our Team.** Our team members are not mere workers, but human beings with fears, dreams, challenges, aspirations, passions, and families. Let's get to know them (within

reasonable bounds)! Asking open-ended questions, and looking for opportunities to have some fun on work time and also spending time with people outside of normal work hours can be helpful. Over the years, my teams and I have gone bowling, played miniature golf, attended movies, cheered on our local NBA team (go Blazers!), and enjoyed many visits to nearby restaurants or had food brought into the workplace.

**4. Foster Social Connections.** Multiple research studies confirm that positive social connections at work produce highly desirable results. For example, people get sick less often, recover twice as fast from surgery, experience less depression, learn faster and remember longer, tolerate pain and discomfort better, display more mental acuity, and perform better on the job. On the other hand, research at the University of California found that the probability of dying early is 70% higher for people with poor social relationships! We can encourage social connections among our team members in a variety of ways, such as: having places to take breaks together, having team building meetings and activities (refer to #3 above), acknowledging work anniversaries, celebrating birthdays and other life events, and sometimes just having some fun and laughing together. I like this quote from Andrew Carnegie, "There is little success where there is little laughter."

## 5. Ensure a Moderate Workload and Work Hours for Every Employee.

There is no place for burning out people in a culture of caring. We should ensure every employee has a reasonable workload and can handle their responsibilities without stress and panic. And we need to minimize the stress on our team members. Experts say that 60-80% of workplace accidents are attributed to stress, and that 80% of doctor visits are related to stress. One large scale study showed a strong link between leadership behavior and heart disease in employees. Stress producing bosses are literally bad for the heart — let's not be that kind of boss!

## 6. Practice Continual Recognition and Appreciation.

Everybody likes to receive positive recognition and appreciation. In all my years of leadership in both for-profit and nonprofit organizations, I have never had anyone complain they were receiving too much recognition and appreciation. To

be most effective and motivating, recognition and appreciation need to be ongoing, not just an occasional occurrence. Zig Ziglar stated, "People say that motivation doesn't last. Well neither does bathing — that's why we recommend it daily!"

**7. Be a Psychological Safe Place.** Amy Edmondson from Harvard is considered the world's leading expert on psychological safety in the workplace. Her research shows that a culture of safety where leaders are inclusive, humble, forgiving, and encourage their staff to speak up or ask for help leads to better learning and performance outcomes. Rather than creating a culture of fear of negative consequences, feeling safe in the workplace encourages people to learn new things, be innovative, and own up to and learn when a mistake happens.

**8. Celebrate Success.** When we see our team members demonstrate the caring behaviors we want, we need to positively reinforce and celebrate. Management guru Ken Blanchard has long promoted the concept of MBWA (Management by Walking Around) and catching people

doing something right — then immediately giving a sincere praise (recognition).

**9. Hire with Care.** We should be very careful when we hire new team members. If we are developing the caring and positive culture we want, we need actively engaged team members who believe in the culture we are creating. Adhering to strict screening and onboarding processes will help us bring on new people that will enhance our team. One source of potential attractive new hires is to encourage referrals from our existing team members.

**10. Extend a Caring Culture Beyond the Workplace.** Part of the way our team culture is defined is how we interact with people outside our immediate team. Outsiders include co-workers from other departments and our vendors and suppliers. Extending care to them will be a true win-win; they will respond well and feel appreciated, and we and our teams will receive high quality support. It's also very important to extend care to our internal and external customers. Customers want to know we value them, not just their money.

Closing thought: Preeminent psychologist William James counseled, "Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does." When we intentionally act to develop a caring culture our team members and our stakeholders will benefit and feel good — and so will we as leaders! ■

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# A ROADMAP TO HIGH-QUALITY OPERATIONS

BY WES FRIESEN

**N**o matter what operations we are involved with, pursuing high quality is essential. What is quality? A simple definition is, "Quality is providing products or services that customers need, and that are free from deficiencies and errors." Studies have shown — and experts agree — that high quality has many benefits, including increased customer value, satisfaction, and loyalty; repeat business and new business; and employee pride.

One proven approach to developing and sustaining high-quality practices is to embrace Dr. W. Edward Deming's 14 Principles of Quality Management. Who was Dr. Deming? Simply put, he has been called the Father of the Quality Management movement. He first rose to fame by helping the Japanese achieve strong manufacturing and business success after World War II. Later, his philosophies were embraced by a number of US companies such as Ford, Xerox, Ricoh, Sony, Proctor & Gamble, and many others. Deming has the unique distinction of receiving prestigious awards from both Emperor Hirohito of Japan and President Reagan of the US (impressive!).

## Deming's 14 Principles of Quality Management

These are a set of management practices to help companies increase their quality and productivity. Deming taught that by adopting appropriate principles of management, organizations can increase quality and simultaneously reduce costs (by reducing waste, rework, employee turnover, and litigation while increasing customer loyalty). Following are my paraphrased versions of the principles:

**1. Create a constant purpose toward improvement.** We should plan for quality in the long term, and resist reacting with short-term solutions (such as sacrificing quality to achieve cost cutting pressures). Predict and prepare for future challenges, and always have the goal of getting better. I like this quote from Steve Jobs, "Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected."

**2. Adopt the new philosophy.** Embrace quality throughout our teams and the organization. Put our customers' needs first, and design our products and services to meet those needs. Be prepared for a changed mindset in the way business is done. It's about leading, not simply managing. Create our quality vision, and implement it.

**3. Stop depending only on physical inspections.** Inspections can be costly and unreliable — and they don't improve quality, they merely find a lack of quality. The idea is to build quality into the process from start to finish. We don't just find what we did wrong — we should eliminate the "wrongs" altogether. Consider using statistical controls, checklists, or other methods — not physical inspections alone — to prove that the process is working. One wise approach is to emphasize front-end testing prior to releasing our outputs. Author Brian Lawley counseled, "Doing testing with real users (in addition to internal quality testing) can help you avoid the serious embarrassment of a failed product."

**4. Build a positive partnership with our suppliers.** Look at suppliers as our partners in quality. Encourage them to spend time improving their own quality — they shouldn't compete for our business

based on price alone. When relevant, we can use quality statistics to ensure that suppliers meet our quality standards. Look for "win-win" long-term relationships with our suppliers, in which they get our business and we get excellent, quality service.

**5. Improve constantly and forever.** Continuously improve our systems and processes. Deming promoted the Plan-Do-Check-Act approach to process analysis and improvement. Emphasize training and education so everyone can do their jobs better.

**6. Use training on the job.** Train for consistency to help reduce variation and mistakes. Build a foundation of common knowledge. Help workers to understand their roles in the "big picture," which supports the insight from respected CEO Frances Hesselbein, "People want to feel that what they do makes a difference." Encourage staff to learn from one another, and provide a culture and environment for effective teamwork ("all for one, one for all").

**7. Implement leadership.** Encourage our supervisors and managers to understand their team members and the processes they use. Don't simply supervise — provide support and resources so that each team member can do his or her best following the servant leader philosophy. Be an affirming coach instead of an aggressive police. Figure out what each person actually needs to do his or her best. Emphasize the importance of participative management and transformational leadership. Find ways to reach full potential, and don't just focus on meeting targets and quotas.

**8. Eliminate fear.** Allow people to perform at their best by ensuring that they're not afraid to express ideas or concerns. Let everyone know that the goal is to achieve high quality by doing more things right — and that we're not interested in blaming people when mistakes happen. Make workers feel valued, and encourage them to look for better ways to do things. Ensure that our leaders are approachable and that they work with teams to act in the organization's best interests. Use open and honest communication to remove fear from our teams.

**9. Break down barriers between departments.** Build the "internal customer" concept — recognize that each department or function serves other departments that use their output. Build a shared vision that we are all on the same team with a common purpose to add value to our organization's stakeholders. Use cross-functional teamwork to build

understanding and reduce adversarial relationships. Focus on collaboration and partnership and mutual problem solving.

**10. Clarify expectations.** We should eliminate unclear slogans and ambiguous goals. Let people know exactly what we want — don't make them guess. "Excellence in service" is short and memorable, but what does it mean? How is it achieved? The message is clearer if we are more specific, such as "our goal is 99.5+ % same day delivery" or "we are aiming for a customer satisfaction rating of 8.7+ on a scale of 10." We can outline our expectations, and then praise people face-to-face and in other ways for doing good work.

**11. Eliminate unnecessary or unrealistic numerical targets.** Look at how the process is carried out, not just numerical targets. Deming said that production targets encourage high output and low quality. Provide support and resources so that production levels and quality are high and achievable. Measure the process rather than the people behind the process. One of Deming's quotes was, "Eighty-five percent of the reason for failure are deficiencies in the systems and process rather than the employee. The role of man-

agement is to change the process rather than badgering individuals to do better."

**12. Remove barriers to pride of workmanship.** Allow everyone to take pride in their work without being compared. Treat all workers positively, and don't make them compete with other workers for monetary or other rewards. I resonate with the philosophy of esteemed management expert Dr. Ken Blanchard. Blanchard is a proponent that there should be no quotas on high performance ratings. For example, if the organization uses a 1 – 5 scale (5 being highest), every employee should have the opportunity to earn a 5 rating. That doesn't mean that everybody will earn a 5, but knowing a 5 rating achievable is motivating to most folks.

**13. Implement education and self-improvement.** Improve the current skills of workers. Encourage people to learn new skills to prepare for future changes and challenges. Build skills to make our workforce more adaptable to change, and better able to find and achieve improvements. And we should recognize increased skills and performance improvements, including the "small" changes we see. Author Robert Collier suggested, "Success is the

sum of small efforts, repeated day-in and day-out."

**14. Make "transformation" everyone's job.** We can improve our overall organization by having each person take a step toward quality. Author Lloyd Dobbs once wrote, "If there is no worker involvement, there is no quality system." We can personalize and pull from Deming's 14 principles and have open discussions with our teams and gain their buy-in into pursuing ever improving quality management. ■

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# CHARACTER COUNTS!

BY WES FRIESEN

If recent history teaches us anything, it's that ethics and character count, both in corporate and non-profit organizations. I have suffered from the poor character of others; what about you? Good character is especially important for those of us in leadership roles. Researcher Sam Walker studied successful teams and concluded that the most crucial ingredient in a team that achieves and sustains success is the character of the person who leads it. Respected leadership professors Kouzes and Posner found that the most important trait of a successful leader is character, especially the attribute of integrity.

I recently came across a study by the leadership consultancy firm KRW, measuring the impact of CEOs with high character vs. those with low character. First, let's define what qualifies as high-character. Four moral principles were identified in such a leader: integrity, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion. In regard to overall corporate performance, CEOs possessing these qualities had an average return on assets (ROA) of 9.35% over a two-year period. CEOs identified as having low character only scored 1.93%. Therefore, high-character CEOs had a stunning five times the ROA of low-character leaders! Sadly, low-character leaders appeared to have alarmingly low self-awareness. They seemed to be the last ones to know of their deficiencies. When low-character leaders rated themselves, it was usually much higher than their employees rated them.

Conversely, when high-character leaders rated themselves, it was usually much lower than their employees

rated them. What we learn from these self-evaluations is that high character is intricately tied to humility. The best CEOs did not fully realize the positive impact they were making on their teams. I suggest this study is relevant whether we are a CEO or a supervisor of a small team. In other words, when we develop high-character traits, the data shows that not only will we personally benefit, but our team and organization will perform at an exceedingly higher level as well.

## How Can We Cultivate Our Character?

Can we cultivate and further develop our character? Fortunately, the answer is yes! But developing our character is not a given, and our character can actually decline. But here are eight strategies we can use to further develop our character:

**1. Be intentional about character development.** I suggest that being intentional about prioritizing our character is a good starting point. An Irish proverb says, "Better to be a man of character than a man of means." Author Les Brown echoes a similar sentiment, "In the end, it is the person you become, not the things that you achieve, that is most important." Stephen Covey taught, "Primary greatness is on the inside. It's about character."

**2. Make it a life-long journey.** Heraclitus once said, "Good character is not formed in a week or a month. It is created little by little, day by day. Protracted and patient effort is needed to develop good character." I would agree. Viewing character development as more of a marathon than a sprint can help us keep moving even when we stumble along the way. That being said, I want to keep my

stumbles small as respected leadership Warren Buffet warned when he said, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."

## 3. Define and stay true to our values.

One of the university courses I teach is business ethics. One assignment I give is for the students to define their most important values and the key approaches they want to use to make "grey area" ethical decisions. There are a lot of worthwhile values for us to consider embracing (such as the four previously mentioned in the CEO study, and potentially many others — love, justice, peace, etc.). The recommendation is to narrow down our top five to 10 values. We can go on to identify key criteria for making decisions, such as following the Golden Rule (treating people positively like we would like to be treated), loving others as we love ourselves, and seeking to serve and add value to people. I agree with Roy Disney when he said, "It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are."

## 4. Guard what we feed our minds on.

Early in my career I was taught the concept of GIGO ("Garbage In, Garbage Out") — which can be applied to a variety of business applications (e.g. bad assumptions used to build budgets lead to bad budgets). But the concept of GIGO can apply to us in terms of what we allow to feed our minds on — things we watch, things we read, things we think most about. Saint Paul gave this advice, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, fix your thoughts on such things."

## 5. Practice spiritual disciplines.

Many leadership experts like Maxwell, Blanchard, Covey, and others tout the value of practicing spiritual disciplines. Included would be regular times of prayer, meditation, and slowing down to reflect. Also, it's valuable to drink deeply from character-building books like sacred texts from your religious organization (I just finished a study of the Gospel of John from the Bible) and other classics like Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search of Meaning*. It's also helpful to find a faith community where people are supporting, encouraging, and holding each other accountable.

**6. Keep company with high-character people.** The reality is that we are

significantly influenced by the people we spend the most time with. Personal development expert Jim Rohn taught that “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” My philosophy is to be friendly with everyone I encounter, but be careful with respect to who my closet friends are.

**7. Solicit ongoing feedback from others.** Seeking guidance and feedback from trusted mentors, advisors, and others that care about us is very helpful. Recently, I was at a staff meeting and spoke out against an idea. The next day a trusted leader called me and gave me some constructive feedback which I needed to hear (in hindsight, I realized I had spoken out emotionally, not calmly and rationally). It was humbling and I ended up apologizing — but it was important to help me develop and demonstrate the character I desire. Other tools to gain feedback include participating in surveys and asking for feedback in some of our one-on-one meetings.

**8. Learn from our life experiences — and the experiences of others.** I

appreciate this quote from Nick Vujicic, who was born without arms or legs. He said, “Your character is formed by the challenges you face and overcome.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” One important concept that I teach and have embraced is “evaluated experience is the best teacher.” Taking the time to reflect and learn from our life experiences is a great pathway to developing our character and being more successful.

We also can learn from the experiences of others. One way to do that is to engage in professional associations and hear about experiences from our peers. I really appreciate teaching adult learners and the engagement and mutual learning that takes place in the classroom. Other means to learn from others include: reading books and articles by experienced practitioners and experts; participating in conferences, seminars, and webinars; listening to podcasts; and finding email

resources (e.g. Minute with Maxwell, Jon Gordon’s weekly newsletter).

**Closing thought:** Horace Greeley once wrote, “Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, and riches take wings. Only one thing endures, and that is character.” Let’s be men and women of character, set a good example, and make the world a better place! ■

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