

Jack and Patti Phillips: Linking ROI to Learning Objectives

Business Perspectives on Managing World-Class Training

Training Industry

Q U A R T E R L Y

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BUILDING YOUR TRAINING LEGACY

- **Performance Support:** The Next Evolution
- **Focal Point:** Targeting Training With Limited Budgets

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WINNING & LOSING ORGANIZATIONS

In the past few columns, I've discussed the importance of putting culture first as a method of managing success. Naturally, not every company follows that path, to the detriment of some of them. One obvious tragic and unnecessary example of a company that put strategy first and, by so doing, destroyed its culture first, then its people, and finally its business, is Enron.

However, many others have done likewise throughout the annals of business history. In the mid-1990s, Sunbeam's infamous CEO, Al "Chainsaw" Dunlap, fired half his workforce and mercilessly abused the other half. Even after Dunlap was fired in 1997, Sunbeam fought for four years to get back on track and finally filed for Chapter 11 in 2001.

Of course, these are extreme examples, and all are easy to recognize in hindsight. Most organizations are a mixed bag of varying competencies and commitments, however – often a few great performers (though not necessarily in leadership positions), lots of well-intentioned and capable people, and a fair share of lower performers. They may try their best to create a meaningful culture, but for many different reasons their people don't work together as well as they could, their processes aren't as effective as they should be, and their strategies aren't all of the winning variety.

Quite often, organizations aren't even aware of the many ways in which they may be slowing themselves down, overlooking opportunities or sabotaging their own efforts. My own research to date has revealed at least 11 key best practices that are essential for a sustained, high-performing culture. And, most companies typically possess very few of these! Even noteworthy strong cultures like those mentioned previously, leave opportunities for continuously improving their performance on the table by not effectively putting all 11 of these best practices into daily action.

One company that appears to be doing very well at the moment is Google. Its forward acceleration has been assisted by focus aligned on its priorities. Culture and people have been given top billing first at Google. For example, programmers and engineers often have a significant impact on their company's processes and strategies. "Do no evil" is the motto of their business culture, and to date they have stuck by it.

One of Google's advantages is that it sought to align its priori-

QUITE OFTEN, ORGANIZATIONS AREN'T EVEN AWARE OF THE MANY WAYS IN WHICH THEY MAY BE SLOWING THEMSELVES DOWN

ties, people, processes and strategies correctly from the beginning when it was easier to do so as a smaller organization, not a mega-business. Most companies do just the opposite, thinking they can't afford the time for this in their beginning plateaus when just the opposite is, in fact, the harsh reality! And, then they learn the hard way how difficult, costly, disruptive and time-consuming it often is to undo its historical pattern of counterproductive attitudes, habits and practices.

Fortunately, all that's necessary to start making the transition from a well-meaning but underachieving organization is to recognize that there is a superior way to organize and manage and develop any organization—regardless of industry, size, or stage. And, for those organizations that are currently either at a steady state of doing well or enjoying the fruits of growth, their challenge is to realize that this never lasts forever for any business. For such organizations, the enlightened among them will realize that now is the best time to plan and initiate those changes required to enable them to sustain their success—including when conditions take a negative turn.

Dr. Michael O'Connor is a recognized thought leader, executive coach and founder of Life Associates, Inc. Michael is the co-author of "The Leadership Bridge Program (Situational Leadership II & DISC)" and the book, "The Leader Within." E-mail Michael at droconnor@lifeassociatesinc.com.