

Opinion: The rise of the Chief Happiness Officer

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Companies are desperately fighting declining productivity all over the world. Until now, cost-cutting, managerial control, and new systems have been the solution. But I believe there's a better way. And it all starts with hiring a new guy whose only job is to build employee motivation. I give you: the Chief Happiness Officer.

I regularly attend networking meetings for senior executives. Here, we discuss the topics and challenges facing our companies; "stealing" great ideas from our peers. For the past few years there's been one predominating topic: how do you increase productivity in your company? Unfortunately, not many ideas have come up worth stealing.

Several surveys have revealed that productivity is a major concern in companies all over the world. According to McKinsey, 58% of the world's companies are proactively addressing productivity issues. And according to INSEAD, nine out of 10 companies have declared that boosting productivity will be their top priority in the next three to five years.

For many companies it's a matter of life and death. Productivity equals competitiveness. And – as we all know – if you are not competitive, you are not in business.

The productivity paradox

It seems quite simple. After all, we have plenty of approaches to make people work both harder and smarter (as the highly paid consultants like to say). The executive toolbox is filled with LEAN management, Six Sigma, sourcing to low-cost countries, and endless amounts of technology that force the work pace up and control all aspects of the company in a never-ending search for business excellence.

But, strangely enough, productivity also plummets in companies that are using all the tools from the executive toolbox. Researchers call it “the productivity paradox,” which I guess is a scientific way of saying: “We can’t explain what is happening.”

Here’s my take on it: offer a carrot – not a stick. Modern day business excellence tools are basically big sticks aimed at “pushing” employees forward. However, no one – regardless of their level in the organisation – likes being pushed around. It kills motivation. And once motivation is down, your business is in a downward spiral. No paradox. Just plain old dissatisfaction.

This challenge centers around people, and therefore, it must be solved by people.

The Chief Happiness Solution

Enter the Chief Happiness Officer. I am convinced that by 2016 all major companies will have a member of the executive board whose only focus will be raising productivity through employee motivation. In the old school companies, he or she would be called the Chief Productivity Officer. In less formal/new school companies, he or she will be known as the Chief Happiness Officer.

The Chief Happiness Officer will base his or her work on two very simple psychological aspects: motivation and engagement. If you are happy, you are more motivated, and if you invent your own solution to a problem, you become engaged and are more likely to implement it. That’s the reason why happy people don’t get divorced. And that’s why overweight people are three times more likely to actually stick to a diet if they have created the diet in cooperation with their dietician. And the same goes for employees.

Companies need to make productivity solutions with the employees not impose them on the employees. If we get the employees involved in making the productivity solutions they’ll be implementing, we’ll also help them re-discover their work satisfaction and boost their work motivation at the same time.

In the future, the Chief Happiness Officer will be responsible for improving managerial-employee dialogue. He or she will create new, efficient business processes in cooperation with the employees. He or she will keep assuring the managers that trust is better than control. He or she will continuously calm down the guys from finance and reassure them that employees are actually capable of making their own decisions and that everything will be OK. And he or she will make people love – and not loathe – every piece of technology and every new system we implement to improve productivity.

I know this may seem far-fetched. But trust me, it will happen. Because positive thinking has, since the beginning of time, always outperformed negative thinking. And motivated employees will always be more productive than employees who are only at work to bring home the bacon.

It's a simple tool to use and implement. Feel free to "steal with pride" – and pass it on.

- Soren Schonemann is the managing director – Australia/New Zealand, for Danish-based company Jabra. He holds a Master of Science in Sales and Marketing from Aarhus Business School and a Bachelor degree in Business and Administration.

Via Laurence Vanhee