

Coping with changing employee attitude

By V PRADEEP KUMAR

I have been observing the constant change in attitudes of employees over the last two decades. Turning the clock back, during the 70's and 80's, things were different. Our economy wasn't doing anything great and wasn't close to becoming a world super power that it will now be. The revolution in IT, BT, BPO industries were not even dreams. The job opportunities weren't many and the government, banks and public sector still were favourites for job seekers.

Advertise for a job-sales, finance or administration, you would be inundated with applications-all by snail mail. It wasn't unusual to see applicants walk-

ing in to drop their applications and trying to sneak a meeting with decision makers. And after getting into an organisation, they remained there steady with fewer career moves, even if they didn't retire. Discipline, commitment, loyalty weren't advocated, they were usually taken for granted.

But nowadays everything has changed, especially the attitudes of employees and has radically shifted the employment market. The genesis of the problem has its roots in:

- Increased job opportunities
- Shortage of skilled manpower
- Increased family income
- Increased standard of living
- Life style changes and aspirations.
- Low commitment levels
- Monetary benefit expectation
- Increased job hopping trend

■ Behavioural and discipline issues

All employment survey and studies indicate that attitude is the most important aspect affecting performance of organisations. The modern organisation have become hotbed of competition with heavy task orientation and insecurity. This coupled with myth that things would be better in another organisation, has resulted in sweeping changes in employee attitudes.

Therefore coping with changed employee attitudes and expectation is a huge challenge. The challenge is even greater at operational level, for managers. Having been part of organisations witnessing such employee syndromes and at the forefront of meeting those challenges, here

are my thoughts on what an organisation can do to combat such challenges:

1. Make jobs profiles interesting

a. Job profiles have to be made interesting from an employee's perspective. Jobs shouldn't be routine and monotonous and efforts should be to bring in an element of variation or excitement, even occasionally.

b. Job descriptions have to be clear and precise in terms of what the expectations of the employer are. Equally important are the expectations of the employee from the organisation and how expectations of each other are met.

c. Along with job profile it's also necessary to have key result areas for each job so that employees are aware of expectations. Marketing and Production being line functions always have had quantitative objectives but HR and finance generally could get away with qualitative objectives which are not amenable for proper evaluation.

2. Institute strong interview and selection process

a. We need to have strong selection process to identify the right candidate. The selection process cannot be a mere number game to fill up the vacancies. The turnover of employees in the first few days are more attributed to weaknesses in the selection process.

b. Even though sourcing candidates is a challenge for the HR function, it's desirable to have a detailed selection process. This will ensure communication skills are tested and in place.

c. The stress levels in today's competitive industrial environ-

ment are high and employees are constantly under high pressure to perform. It's therefore necessary that employees need to be relatively strong emotionally to handle such pressures. This should be tested in the selection process appropriately and the skills sharpened periodically through training.

d. The line managers have to be involved in selection process which no longer can be the domain of the HR function and the top management.

e. It's better to project the tougher aspects of a job rather than avoiding them. It's necessary that a potential employee knows clearly what he is getting into as otherwise there can be gaps between expectations and reality leading to turnover.

3. Give jobs to the needy
a. A candidate with a strong need for job would be more stable and a committed employee as compared to a candidate who is less job dependent. In the wake of increased family income and ability to sustain periods of unemployment, employees from such background are more susceptible for job shifts.

4. Make recruitment and training a continuous process

a. The process of recruitment has to be continuous and proactive, irrespective of vacancies. This way, an organisation would always have short listed candidates ready and hence less vulnerable to turnover and sometimes unreasonable demands from employees.

b. It's a good concept to have people on the bench which can work beautifully in most organisations for junior positions.

c. Similarly, training has to be continuous and not merely a yearly ritual. It's a good idea to have a panel of senior people from different levels of hierarchy involved in training.

5. Institute measures to build organisational loyalty

a. It's not always that employees leave an organisation for monetary benefits. We need to understand that a human being is a bundle of emotions and therefore treat every employee accordingly with dignity and respect.

b. Organisational loyalty can be built with simple measures often costing nothing to the or-

ganisation, but with immense benefits. The measures depend on nature of the organisation, work culture etc.

c. Ensure a healthy balance between work and fun. Organisational pressures peak and can reach very unhealthy levels. High pressures do not lead to high performance always and often letting the pressures off can be more productive.

d. Over a period of time, people tend to become inefficient due to a variety of reasons. What they mean is reaching the climax of low productivity being in the same position or job profile over a long period of time due to lack of even the minimum energy and enthusiasm levels.

e. More and more organisations are adopting flexible work timings within normal guidelines of 8 hours a day or 40 hours or more a week, as the case may be. Where the emphasis is on productivity and not the effort, the guiding philosophy can be appropriately changed.

6. Have a transparent performance evaluation process

a. The annual appraisal process often leads to employee turnover. This is due to unreasonable expectations as well as improper performance evaluation process. Employees invariably relate expectations due to increased costs or aspirations and less due to their performances. We need to handle this contradiction tactfully and proactively.

b. The performance evaluation process has to be clear and as transparent as possible. We must have benchmarks to make decision making process easy and transparent. Managements have to take appropriate decisions

based on merit and without bias.

7. Be innovative

a. Innovation can come in all functional areas whether it is Sales and Marketing, HR or Finance or across the organisation. Innovative ideas can be either work related or for building a healthier environment. Employees should be encouraged to generate Innovative ideas and recognised suitably.

b. Communication has to be clear and has to be in either direction. Clear communication is essential to maintain a healthy work environment and minimise the dangers of corporate gossips.

c. Employee grievances can be nipped in the bud, if superiors have good listening skills and patience. Often good listening and acknowledgement of the problem alone can suffice to address the situation.

8. Management style and environment

a. It's necessary to understand that task or people orientation are not exclusive and focus on one need not mean compromise on the other.

b. Organisational environment can get polluted and tense for silliest of the reasons and often not connected with business. 'Ego' clashes between people often rise to high levels and can spread like wild fire. Operating managers need to take appropriate steps to preserve harmony.

9. Lead by example

Leading by example, is the best way to instill the right attitudes in employees.

It's a fact that all employees join an organisation with high energy, motivation levels and positive attitude and it's only over a period of time, they deteriorate. As employers, we need to have the patience and aptitude to manage the attitude of employees.

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ResumeCentre

The One-Size-Fits-All Resume Usually Fits Nothing

You're about to start your job hunt, and you've come up with what you believe to be a masterful plan: You'll put together the best resume you can, then fire it off to as many companies as you can, in the hopes it will be a good match for at least one job in one organization. It's the classic "throw a bunch of mud against the wall and see if any of it sticks" approach.

It's a strategy that's great for helping you feel like you're really doing something in your job search. Problem is it's far more likely to be a waste of your time, energy and perhaps money than anything else. The one-size-fits-all resume (and its cousin, the one-size-fits-all cover letter) just doesn't work in most cases. Put yourself in the employer's shoes, and it's easy to pinpoint the reasons why:

The Swamp Factor

Most employers dread going through resume piles (or the online resumes they've received) in the first place. They'd rather be doing almost anything else, especially after they've seen too many of these types of resumes.

So when your one-size-fits-all resume shows up, along with dozens of others, the employer will likely spot it immediately, and put it in the circular file (aka the recycle bin) or the delete box, never to be considered again.

Any Job Will Do

Managers trying to fill positions in their organizations don't want to hear from applicants who are merely taking a shot at a job. They want to hear from people who really, truly want the job. The people who do are generally the ones who invest the time and energy necessary to customize their resumes and cover letters to the job and company at hand.

If you were the employer, who would you be more interested in: the person who sent you the same resume he or she has sent everyone else, or the person who sent you a resume tailored to your specific wants and needs?

Details Get Noticed

Every job listing you'll ever see contains clues about the specific experiences, skills and/or educational background the employer is seeking in the person it will hire. If you take the time to identify those characteristics and then highlight them on your resume (and in your cover letter), you'll have the chance to present your potential in the best light possible. In other words, you give the organization what it's looking for instead of trying to (usually unsuccessfully) impose your agenda on the company.

Does customizing your resumes and cover letters take more time than the one-size-fits-all approach? Definitely. Does it involve more research, more energy, more work? Absolutely. But your chances for positive payoff are much greater. As corporate recruiter Nancy Bernardi told the Sacramento Bee recently: "Unfortunately, I don't think a lot of people even read the job descriptions of the positions they apply for. So often they send us resumes that have nothing to do with the job they're applying for. We never call people like that."

WorkLifeBalance

The Pros and Cons of Working from Home

Over the past few years, many organizations have begun to allow their staff members to work out of their homes. With recent advances in technology, including the Web, email, intranets, modems, cheaper fax machines and voice mail, some people rarely go into the main office anymore. Working out of your home is a mixed blessing, though. There are certain benefits that any worker would love. If you are facing a decision of whether or not to take a job with a 10-second commute, take a look at a few pros and cons of working from home.

Pros

- You are free to do as you please.
- There is no commute.
- No one looks over your shoulder.
- You can write off a small portion of your home office expenses on your taxes.
- Your employer usually compensates you for incidental expenses.
- If you are married or have children at home, this type of work situation could be especially convenient for you.

Cons

- It takes a phenomenal amount of self-discipline to start work when you know you don't have to be at the office by 8 a.m.
- You are the only person around all day, so there is no outside pressure to be busy. You must be entirely self-motivated.
- There are no coworkers to go to lunch with.
- You don't get face time with your coworkers, so it is more difficult to find out about new projects you might be interested in.
- The boss can't see that you are working hard or putting in extra hours, so you are judged more on the numbers than your work ethic and other intangible factors.
- There is a danger of putting in too many hours or overworking. As improbable as this might sound, imagine that it's 11 p.m. and you suddenly have a panic attack about work. It's all too easy to go into your home office and work until 1 a.m.

Tips for Working at Home

Working out of your home can be a great solution for certain people. I have worked in an office and in my own study, and I think it takes special discipline to work at home. You need to ask yourself, "Does this work style fit in with what I want and how I am most effective?"

If you do work out of your home, it is important to remember:

- Maintain a presence at the main office. Report in often and let your boss know you are alive and productive.
- Treat your study (or wherever you work) like a real office. Close the door at 6 p.m. and don't open it until you are beginning work the next morning.
- Get dressed as you would for work and be consistent with your hours. Act like you are at the office and not at home, and you stand a good chance of actually being productive.

CareerChange

How Can I Be More Creative?

One of the best ways to increase your own CQ (Creativity Quotient), and hence be more productive in your career, is to regress a little and be more like you were as a kid. Did you know, for instance, that on psychological tests of creativity, only 5 percent of people 18 and older registered in the "creative" range? Among 17 year-olds, 10 percent scored "creative." But among 5 year olds, more than 90 percent demonstrated the creativity to suggest innovative ways of looking at situations and the ability to dream up new ideas.

The best news here is that creativity can be taught. In fact, you can boost your own creative capability just by practicing various forms of sideways thinking. Here are 10 "creativity boosters" that corporate creativity trainers teach their clients to help both individuals and work teams stretch their own imaginative powers:

- Ask "what if" questions. (What if teachers got paid based on how well their students performed? What if executives got paid based on how well they understood the people who work for them? What if supervisors were elected?)
- Daydream whenever you can. Just see what wild ideas you come up and jot them down on note cards. (And keep these cards in a file box of your wild ideas.)
- Try your hand at cooking a meal creatively, without any recipes.
- Do jigsaw and crossword puzzles.
- Watch three-quarters of a movie on video, then turn off the VCR and imagine your own ending.
- Interview people in your work group about some of the inventions they'd like to see happen.
- Imagine changing places with someone in your office for a day -- what would you get to do differently?
- Imagine that you've just won a month-long trip anywhere with the person of your dreams. But you have to choose the place in the next five minutes and leave tomorrow. Where will you go and why?
- Go to or rent a foreign language film with a friend, one where neither of you knows the language nor are there subtitles. As you watch the film, share with each other what you think the main characters are probably saying, feeling and thinking, based just on their expressions and body language.
- Eat a food you've never tasted for lunch or dinner today. Let the new taste sensations roll around on your tongue and try to imagine a "story" to go with them.

So what's the point of this? The point is to get you out of your accepted, expected, and brain-dulling ways of experiencing the world. In order to succeed as grown-up leaders where we work, we must find ways to take ourselves back in time to a long-gone way of seeing and experiencing things afresh. Here's to being five years old again, at least once or twice a day!



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