

FOUND GOLD!

TAPPING THE INNER RICHES OF YOUR TEAM

by Craig Harrison



We're forever looking outward for the answers to our questions and solutions to our problems. Yet the answers often lay within. Indeed the solutions to many challenges lie within our organization's departments, workgroups and teams!

Companies are quick to bring in external consultants and other specialists to solve problems. They will retain management and marketing firms to tell them the secrets to how to be more successful, expand their clientele and better serve their existing customers. Yet what about the wealth of talent and experience within our own companies?

Some of the best innovations, improvements and solutions to problems come from within our ranks, from the rank and file who know the products and services best, who understand internal processes the best. Are we listening? Are we asking for their input? If not, we should be.

More than just having a suggestion box, we need to create a culture where management listens faithfully to employees' ideas and recommendations. Recognize those great and often innovative ideas that come from within. Honor employees who've made a difference from within. Encourage and reward employees who help our company save money, make money, create new products or services or identify new applications or markets for existing products and services.

It is said that one can tell a lot about a company by the people it keeps. Keep your people engaged and invested. Show them their increased involvement will pay dividends for them and the company. Support, nurture and encourage their application of knowledge to help your company run better. Especially during lean times you can't afford to ignore these voices of experience and insight.

Here are some suggestions for creating a culture where internal solutions spring forth.

■ Hold periodic brainstorming meetings where judgments are suspended and "anything goes" in terms of proposing new ideas. During brainstorming sessions all attendees are equal. Ideas can and should come from everyone. Even if 90% of the ideas proposed aren't implemented, they pave the way by stimulating discussions of ideas that will be adopted. This is an opportunity to think "outside of the box" and employ a "what if...?" approach. Use toys, games, a fun

environment and positive reinforcement to encourage innovative thinking and "sky's the limit" ideas. Only later should you can put your reality caps back on and determine what's actually feasible.

■ Create regular contests and programs to cultivate new ideas. You can define the problem to be solved or the area you seek input. Make sure to acknowledge and recognize contributors, whether through town meeting ceremonies, profiles in a company newsletter, or in other ways. One company has an "Innovator of the Month" award that includes a choice parking space for 30 days and a lunch with the CEO for each month's winner.

■ Come to your employees for new ideas and help. Many employees have ideas but are intimidated or afraid of coming forward to share them. Make it easier for them by coming to them. I believe in management by wandering and also the notion of walking a mile in others' shoes periodically. Get to know your employees on their turf. Understand their jobs and how they see existing processes and how they can be improved. Secure managers are proud of the ideas that spring forth from their employees. Employees respect and work harder for managers who advocate for their employees and come into the trenches to really experience work on the line.

■ Test the waters. If you're hearing employees say "management doesn't listen" or "management doesn't care" then you've got work to do in changing a perception that's hazardous to your success. Employees that feel invested in a company will go the extra mile for it. You may have to go the extra mile for them to create the perception that management is receptive to their ideas and does value their input. Now make sure the perception is accurate.

There's gold in them thar' employees. By creating a culture of caring and valuing your employees as the precious resources they are, you'll succeed together. Eureka, you've struck gold! ■

Craig Harrison is a professional speaker, corporate trainer and communication consultant who builds credible and confident communicators and stellar sales and service organizations. Contact him at (510) 547-0664 or through Craig@VoiceOfCustomerService.com

Visit his website www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com for more resources and solutions

