



Fire Up Your Employees

BY JAY FORTE

Your employees' performance is just average; they do just enough to get by. Customers don't excite them. Their work doesn't excite them. They have to be constantly watched, even to do the basics. You catch them playing on the computer and hear talk of what other jobs are paying. Achieving performance and financial targets is a constant struggle. Sound the alarm ... you are suffering from smoldering employees; they have the embers of performance, but no fire.

When our workplace changed from the industrial age of making things to today's intellectual age of providing service, it significantly changed what we want and need from our employees. In the past, we needed manpower and horsepower to run machinery and manufacture products. But as manufacturing moved offshore, we moved from horsepower to brainpower. Thinking and knowledge now drive results. "One-size-fits-all" jobs no longer exist; thinking is personal and not all employees think the same way. We must start to align the way employees think with the thinking needed in their jobs to activate their passion, interest, emotion, and performance. When we do, employees become more engaged and passionate about what they do and perform at exceptional levels; boredom and discontentment in the workplace disappear.

We must inspire and engage employees to ignite their passions and emotions; command-and-control is out. It is important to connect with employees to know and understand them, in order to help them perform at their best level. Management must relearn how to engage employees or be prepared for high turnover and a daily struggle for performance. Consider these five steps to fire up employees and smoke your competition:

1. Create an employee-focused workplace culture. This workplace culture openly appreciates, values and develops employees, attracts and retains the best

candidates. A workplace culture that is employee-focused includes: sharing a powerful mission, vision and goals; implementing rich training and employee retention programs; providing recurring skill and career development and creating a culture of open participation and contribution. Employees get fired up working for an organization that is publicly focused on their value and their success.

2. Match employee talents and training to job position. Talents manifest themselves differently in each employee; any employee is not a good fit for any job. Employees are fired up about jobs whose thinking and performance requirements match their talents and passions. The closer they are matched, the more passionate performance happens. Start with Tom Rath's Strengthsfinder 2.0 to learn the language of talents. Then summarize talent by employee and talent by each role in the organization. Match talents needed with the talents of the employees for the best performance. Only those that are excited about their work (because it matches their talents and passions) will be fired up to perform.

3. With the right employees in the right roles, define performance expectations. Studies show employees are more excited about performance when they know what is expected and create the plan to achieve them. This personalizes each role, takes advantage of their talents and encourages employees to own their performance. Employees are fired up when they have a voice, are made to feel competent, and can control their performance.

4. Build a strong personal connection though recurring performance feedback and training. Act as a coach and educator; encourage employees to continually improve their skills to achieve their performance expectations. The more contact you have with employees in a positive and supportive way, the stronger the personal connection.



This connection is the core of millennial management; employees are loyal to those who know them, care about them and spend time helping them improve.

5. Host recurring "Career Conversations." Employees respond to a compelling personal vision of the future. To keep employees excited about performance, host "Career Conversations" or development discussions several times a year. Discuss the employee's talents and interests in conjunction with the needs and direction of the organization. This insures a viable plan as it blends the needs of the organization with the talents, interests and goals of the employees. Allowing employees a voice in the development process is one of the most significant ways to fire up an employee.

The world has changed; it is time to write a new story. This one has to be bolder, more engaging and feature the employee. Employees are the brains and heart, the knowledge and emotions, the actions and passion of the organization. This powerful new organizational asset must be well understood to be well managed. Engage and inspire employees. Listen to and care about them. Fire them up! And in return, they will smoke your competition. **PRO**

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