

Up, Up With People

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Hello, and welcome to the Back Page. My name is Julius E. Rhodes, senior professional human resources, and I am delighted to be your inaugural contributing writer for this monthly segment that will provide you with new ways of looking at familiar issues that affect all of us. How many times have you heard someone say, “People are our biggest asset?” If you are like me, this phrase has become so well worn it’s like a tire that is past its prime, is bald and in need of replacement. Given our economic woes, high rates of unemployment and recession-related employment issues, the reality is that many people feel like they are being treated in such a way that employers are saying, “you are lucky you still have a job.”

While this may not be the case universally, it is likely more true than we want or care to admit. Therefore, if we want to do more than just have hope that we can win with people, what are some definitive steps that we can take to get on the winning path? I’m glad you asked.

I want to start with what for many of us might seem like a minor thing, but in reality is paramount that we have control over: our choice of words. You see, life is not about what happens to us but, rather, how we respond to what happens to us. I have often heard people say that they work for me, as if somehow they serve at my pleasure and ultimate discretion. But people don’t work for you, they work with you — and the recognition that a person receives by substituting “with” for the word “for” cannot be overstated in terms of the feeling of inclusion it endears.

Next, while many people speak about hiring the best people, sadly, that is not enough. If we hope to get on with the business of winning with people, we not only need to hire the best (hopefully a given), but we need to provide the type of environment that allows us to bring out the best in our team members.

Think of it this way: with their recent acquisitions, few can argue that the Miami Heat have the best talent in the National Basketball Association.

However, and you heard it here first, if the organization and the team does not provide an opportunity for each member to feel secure in their role and believe that they are making a positive contribution to the overall success of the team as a result of doing their best during the course of the season, then they will not win an NBA title this year or any other year.

Mind you, I am not saying that there cannot be bumps in the road because, with any organization, these will surely occur. But when issues of misalignment occur, they have to be addressed and resolved expediently.

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Now, some of you may be asking what it takes to bring out the best in the members of your team. How do we create that harmonious state that allows for full-functioning? Well, in this regard I think we need to keep the following in mind:

- There can be no hidden agendas — everything must be out in the open.
- Everyone must be expected to make a contribution and, while we may not have equal talents, we can sacrifice equally in obtaining the efforts we desire.
- There can be no fear of retribution.
- Trust, which is obtained through experience and time, must continually be upheld and reinforced.

In addition, we need to recognize people appropriately while sharing organizational and individual successes (professional and personal). Remember the people who comprise our teams have a life outside of work.

Always remember that the biggest opportunity for future success lies with those people who have helped us build our success in the past. I always say, “If you can’t sell it on the inside, then you can’t sell it on the outside.” What this means is that if your current employees cannot tell a clear, convincing, compelling and consistent account of how they are experiencing

life day-to-day in your environment in a positive sense then there is no way you can expect them to make those patrons who utilize your services feel totally connected to your organization.

People are our biggest assets, but if there is a choice as to what people will believe, your actions will always speak louder than your words. ▢

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