Developing employees is key to building a great company

In his best-selling book "Good to Great," Jim Collins shares the view that "who" is more important than "what" when it comes to building a great company.

First determine who is on your team and in what positions, and then figure out what you are committed to accomplishing as an organization.

With great people on the team and in the right positions, there are no limits to what can be accomplished.

That sounds right, but how do you build a company with "great" people?

Try this — recruit the right people, and then make a real commitment to training and developing them to expand their professional, communication, social and leadership skills.

BUILDING BUSINESS

BILL BOYAR

IT STARTS WITH RECRUITING

The starting point for building an organization populated by effective people is recruiting. Being intentional about recruiting is critical. Have a clearly articulated hiring protocol, hire from the company's mission and values, and hire people who bring passion to the job.

Hiring only for professional skills, without considering these other components can be dangerous and costly.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Companies that successfully develop great people treat training and development as a core value. It's not something that is discretionary.

In companies where people are the most important resource, a core commitment to developing people withstands economic pressures. It doesn't get cut when things get difficult.

T&D is treated the same as paying base compensation and benefits. If you don't pay salary and benefits, you won't have any people. If you don't continue to invest in T&D, the people you do retain will not develop and the organization will suffer accordingly.

AREAS OF FOCUS

The four key areas of focus for effective T&D programs are professional/technical, communication and social skills and leadership.

• Professional/technical skills: Building competence is key to the success of any organization. This is where most organizations focus their T&D resources.

Programs should be put into place that provide opportunities for people at all levels of the company to improve their skills and knowledge base. These can range from programs that are internally designed and executed to externally designed programs utilizing consulting resources or Web-based training.

All professional and technical training should be tailored to the specific requirements of the positions and the demands of those jobs.

• Communication skills: Along with professional and technical training, people need to be trained to communicate effectively.

A common threat to organizational well-being is the lack of a consistent communication environment and people trained to operate within it. People need tools to be able to communicate accurately and authentically with their co-workers, vendors and customers.

Not all people are born natural communicators. That presents the opportunity to provide a framework for communication and train people to operate within that framework. There are outstanding communications consultants that can provide T&D programs focused on creating a culture of effective and valuable interaction.

• Social skills: Another crucial and typically ignored area of T&D is the art of getting along. Working cooperatively can be challenging to certain driven, high-octane individuals.

In any environment where support, mutual respect or similar values are central to the culture, company leadership must take seriously the responsibility of training people to collaborate.

As with communication, not all people are born with innate effective social skills. These skills also need to be developed in a consistent fashion throughout the organization.

There cannot be different rules of behavior for different people at different levels of the organization. Leadership cannot allow people to merely operate in the manner they have learned from their past experiences. If we accept this, then an intentional focus on training in the domain of social integration is imperative to the success of an organization.

• Leadership: The last area of T&D focus is leadership. Leaders are not just born. People are born with leadership tendencies, but real leaders are developed. Any company that aspires to greatness will be measured, at least in part, by the quality of its leadership. A part of what is measured is the ability to develop new generations of leaders.

To achieve that level of leadership competence, a structured leadership development program should be in place. This should include individual development programs and programs that focus on company-wide position training or succession programs.

Many companies consider succession programs as sufficient if the boxes are filled in on the organizational chart. Not true. Succession and leadership programs are only effective if there is active learning involved.

To sum up, great companies train and develop their people in these four key areas — they develop whole people with developed technical and professional competence in their job, heightened communication skills, acute social skills with the ability to get along, and seasoned and inquisitive leaders.

The result is an organization that is itself whole, where the blend of technical, professional, communication, social and leadership competencies drives tremendous value for shareholders, employees and customers.

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