

Leverage Strengths and Manage Weaknesses

Wisdom and Experience

Wisdom is not a matter of high IQ or formal education. Sometimes, in fact, people with common sense lack a formal education, while well-educated people have little or no common sense.

Because wisdom requires experience, age is often associated with being wise. As people age and realize that they are vulnerable and that life can be swept away in a heartbeat, they are better able to see what is important and what is not.

Young people can acquire a wise perspective too. Those exposed to life-altering events, such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in the United States or the SARS outbreak in Asia, have demonstrated a similar reordering of priorities as older folks. Living through a serious illness or crisis puts life into focus, revealing new insights.



Soft is Hard

In the service sector, about 70 percent of an organization's operating costs are associated with compensation. In the manufacturing sector, about 70 percent of an organization's expenses are associated with product costs. In both cases, the challenge is to convert the investment in human capital into cash as quickly as possible. The way to achieve this goal is through an engaged workforce.

Since engaged people increase the chances of future growth, wise leaders want to make the strong stronger. Start with the fully engaged to understand what is going well and then do more of it. Start with what is right, rather than what is wrong.

If you're looking for a way to increase engagement, money isn't the way to go. Or rather, it's not the only way to go. A good, competitive wage matters, but money is not sufficient to cultivate a passionate staff.

Rules are important as well, but they can have unintended consequences. Too many rules erode the skills to practice wisdom. Metrics, too, cannot be relied upon alone. Numbers convince us, but stories inspire us. Numbers offer us precision about what we are doing and how we are doing. Stories offer meaning – they help answer the question why?

The truth is that engagement is a by-product of how people are treated. The order matters. Trusting and caring relationships must come first; engagement follows.

Wisdom is recognizing that soft skills (like creating trusting and meaningful relation-

ships) can produce gritty, effective teams. Culture is a leading indicator best understood by stories. Strategy is a lagging indicator best understood by numbers. Wisdom is recognizing that order matters.

Applied Wisdom: Leverage Strengths

An effective way to increase engagement is to focus on strengths. In fact, disengagement in the workplace drops down to only 1 percent when the boss focuses on strengths.¹

To be clear, leveraging strengths does not mean

ignoring weakness. It does mean that lifting performance levels from pitiful to mediocre isn't a winning formula. The smarter, faster path to high performance is to offset one person's weakness with another's strength, and in the process, lift the entire team.

One of the best ways to strengthen a company culture in the long run is through hiring and promoting decisions. Who is hired and who is promoted are the clearest statements an organization can make about the importance of virtue. Once an organization commits to hiring for character, here is how teams could do so.

1. Brim, Brian and Asplund, Jim (2009). "Driving Engagement by Focusing on Strength," Gallup Business Journal, November 12, 2009, <https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/124214/driving-engagement-focusing-strengths.aspx>