

"I have a low tolerance for unhappiness," Angela declared with a big smile and twinkling eyes. She believes it's important to have fun and celebrate achievements together as a department. What Angela Coke, ADM, Ontario Ministry of Government Services, Modernization Division does as a leader helps knit relationships and continues to inspire her team culture.

Joy and inspiration:

A benefit or a necessity?

by Lorraine Weygman



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Where does it say or infer in the mission, vision or values of any workplace that you can't have fun while you're carrying out your responsibilities? Where does it say that joy at work limits productivity? It actually helps us to be more productive, less stressed, take more initiatives, and ensure a more balanced life.

"People matter most," says Nancy Faraday-Smith, chair, National Capital Region, Social Policy Division, Department of Finance. "They are happiest when they know they can influence the decision makers who will follow-through on their feedback. A sense of humour, recognition of intelligence and a supportive management team all give added value."

Faraday-Smith describes an unhealthy culture as "one where people get the 'Sunday night angst', the knot in their stomach as their weekend concludes and the workweek begins."

How do you create a healthy culture? According to consultant Myrna Ain, co-author of the research report presented to the Conference Board of Canada, *The Best of the Best: The role of leadership and culture in creating Canada's best organizations*, leadership is a promise, a living embodiment of the vision of the organization. When the leader doesn't walk the talk, there is a gap between the espoused values and tolerated behaviour.

"If there is a gap between the organization's espoused values and

these expected attitudes and behaviours, then we have what is called a 'cultural disconnect' – the larger the gap, the greater the employee disengagement. To close the gap, the organization must address its tolerated behaviours," Ain writes, "or else there is a profound and proven negative impact on strategic outcomes such as employee engagement, innovation, team effectiveness and increased citizen confidence in public institutions. Measuring culture, therefore, becomes an essential component of any organization's balanced scorecard."

Ain continues, "Most importantly, an organization's leadership is the primary driver of its culture. Inspiring leaders create inspired cultures. Inspired cultures create inspiring workplaces. Inspiring workplaces create success and prosperity." These are the measurable results of the one-year research study, which subsequently has been applied to various organizations in the private and public sector.

Leaders of constructive cultures focus on achievement and excellence with individuals as self-starters. They accept individual accountability and encouraged self-actualization. A creative, healthy and productive staff translates into success. People are there because they want to be there. Staff feel secure in expressing and taking risks.

Ain's research suggests that when one looks at an organizational culture and notices a cultural disconnect, the gap between Ideal culture



expectations and the Current operating reality, what one sees is a picture of 'follow the leader'. "A culture profile represents the combined impact of the day-to-day actions, attitudes and behaviours of the leaders. For



every organization, measuring the leadership's impact becomes the strategic imperative required for creating and sustaining success." Leaders must inspire vision, which in turn requires inspired and inspiring leadership at all levels.

Vic Pakalnis, Regional Director, Ontario Ministry of Labour and chair, Provincial Interministry Council, advises, "Provide a vision and communicate it, clearly, simply and consistently. A leader must feel confidence in his/her self. The constructive culture that supports a leadership that encourages joy has proven to be the best. For example, you cannot take risk out of decision-making. Otherwise it's not a decision. About 60% of decisions work out. We need to provide a supportive culture to enable decision-making."

Supportive culture

The four objectives of the Modernization Division of the Ontario Ministry of Government Services are to: improve employee engagement; improve customer service; build capacity to create and sustain transformation; and lead and support corporate transformation projects.

To that end, the Deputy Minister of Government Services and Secretary of the Management Board of the Ontario Cabinet, Michelle DiEmanuele, led her team to create and develop four key leadership competencies for the OPS – Transform, deliver Results, Inspire and Connect (TRIC). Interestingly, these fit with the four competencies of the constructive leadership style described in 'The Best of the Best' research paper.

Employee engagement

"We must attract and retain the best people," DiEmanuele says. "At the root of this is marrying organizational and personal values. If they are not lined up, there will be conflict. An individual must understand the organization's values and find meaning in their work, feel successful as a work group, success in themselves and their colleagues and gain recognition for those successes."

She continues, "We must be mindful of the needs of others and look at

values and priorities and give people opportunities, such as leave with pay, some leaves without pay and time out for an investment in learning opportunities. Time and money aren't what counts in learning – mentorship and job shadowing add value. To keep people motivated, leaders must create a belief about what is possible, that they can deliver better than anybody else."

DiEmanuele's department justifiably takes pride in delivering results, particularly with their customer service commitment. Their new money-back guarantee for an online birth certificate in 15 days is the only such guarantee in the world. With over 288,000 birth certificates requested online, only 78 people have requested their money back. The joy of success creates greater motivation and inspiration.

Overcoming Stress

Stress kills and joy serves life. Lack of trust or lack of confidence from the boss can be a big stressor, according to Denise Amyot, ADM at Human Resources and Social Development Canada and president of APEX. Changing priorities is also a stressor. She believes open communication and a sense of humour are essential. "You have to smell, breathe, see, feel joy; we owe it to all of us."

Laughing is an outlet for stress and anxiety, and makes you feel more alive. Coke says: "We welcome new staff with a celebration, have farewell parties and celebrate at the end of a completed project. It shows appreciation and everyone feels good. People work hard to achieve the goals of their projects. When people work the hardest, that's the time to play the hardest."

People who enjoy work have the characteristics of people we all want to hire – a sense of humour, intelligent, energetic, hardworking, able to laugh at themselves, outgoing, friendly, competent and know when to be serious, too. Amyot says that the most important

factor is attitude: "Recruit them for that and help them with the rest."

Pakalnis adds, "Executives often work 8-12 hours a day. Make it fun by enjoying the people you're with. You need a culture that supports fun. That way people receive energy from one another. In the public sector there is more ambiguity due to politics, with a variety of competing priorities and constraints."

Inspirational workplace

It all comes down to communication and how you build relationships, Coke says. Dialogue, give recognition, show appreciation and compassion, create synergy and celebrate. Keep people engaged. Share a vision and purpose in common and know how 'the bits fit together'.

"Recognition inspires people," Amyot emphasizes, "giving them a chance to grow and to shine. They want to be empowered, to be a leader. To work in this team, you need to be a leader."

She asks each of her team, "What will be your legacy, your contribution when you're gone? Everyone must figure that out and share it with the others." Her legacy is to put more humanity into the workplace. By sharing her own, she shows her vulnerability, which keeps her true to her word.

Imagine how much joy and inspiration can exist in a constructive culture where the teams are full of vitality, energy flourishes, conflict is constructive, members participate with enthusiasm, change does not involve suffering, trust is a given, all members are respected and people look forward to coming to work. Imagine a culture where you're at

your best and the collective effort produces results beyond what any individual member could accomplish. Now that's something that works. And some of you are living that right now! 

