

Energy Flows Where the Attention Goes*

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What Performance, Relationship, Innovation and Values have in common is that each is an arena for enhancing, focusing, or suppressing peoples' energy. It follows that the projects with the most available energy are far more likely to succeed.

Good ideas and the force of will are not enough.

Consider the following examples.

TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO PERFORMANCE AND MEASUREMENT

"The king is in the counting house, counting all his money"

-Nursery Rhyme

A large southern United States utility company has a captive market; it also benefits from state-regulated prices, depreciation concessions and a stable workforce. With an assured income stream, the utility makes money hand over fist by managing costs and operations with great integrity.

While the senior management proclaims enduring commitment to the well being of its people and the importance of cooperation, their hierarchical and cross-function relationships are generally shallow and sterile. Few believe that the company cares about them or that the stated values are worth the paper they are printed on. There are, of course, exceptions to this in a few cases where strong loyalties have developed.

Doing well by keeping their word financially, they have never successfully implemented system wide change in information technology, human resources or quality. Innovation is rare. Morale is poor at the same time that everyone puts on a happy public face. When it comes to costs and operations, energy is relatively high. When it comes to Relationship, Innovation and Values,

their energy and integrity is low. Through the lack of innovation and lack of cooperation across functions, growth has stagnated. The stock price has been level for years and the utility is now a candidate for takeover. They pay attention to costs and operations and don't pay attention to people, real thinking and principles. A fraction of the company's available energy is realized.

TOO MUCH RELATIONSHIP

"All we need is love..."

-The Beatles

I participated in a non profit organization for several years. Not much got done because people were so busy relating to one another. E-mail had little substance and seemed to be sent just so people could be connected. Always on the edge of bankruptcy, programs were poorly attended and written communications were sent at the wrong time and usually contained factual errors.

Relationship Energy was high although it was defined in interpersonal and not work terms. People listened and spoke from their hearts. In times of personal crisis they were nurturing. Meetings were a safe haven. Over time, only people with a very high regard for quality of relationship continued to participate. There was little innovation and inquiry beyond the area of improving relationships.

Values were respected but again, only principles regarding the quality of relationship could be addressed with conviction. People were sincere and uncommitted with respect to performance and results. Expert in relationship, they were not able to see the world through the integrity lenses of measurement and performance..

TOO MANY QUESTIONS

"Living in cloud coo-coo land"

A business research and development company is peopled with intellectual giants. They are

dedicated to learning and always push beyond the frontiers of their existing knowledge. They create and test hypotheses and are rarely attached to any single idea. The pursuit of knowledge is their focus; being with them is always stimulating and opens new ideas and pathways for thought. They are extremely well read but never confuse the wisdom they have gleaned from others with questions that remain unanswered right now. They are students of philosophy, leadership and management. They are explorers in the truest sense, exploring the world of ideas and possibilities..

At the same time, their own relationships with each other and with clients tend to be shallow and intellectualized. They trivialize any form of emotional expression. Spiritual practices are similarly devalued and they are more concerned with the pragmatics of inquiry and research than with the actual relevance of principles and relationships to their life and work. In business, their success is marginal and flows from their great talent as teachers. When they do set goals and measures, they are without conviction. They don't follow through on many of their business commitments. Their intellectual integrity is high and performance integrity is low. Although talked about eloquently, values and relationships are not central.

TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

“The Lord does not do windows.”

In the productivity driven modern world, many places are Pragmatic rather than Values driven. Success and pragmatism seem to go together. I do know a spiritual community that fits this bill. They honor the natural world and pray often. They are tranquil and subdued in speech and have daily, weekly and monthly ceremonies that keep their traditions alive and keep them in the presence of their most important principles and values. They are personally close in their immediate families and with their spiritual colleagues. Most enjoy a remarkable, ever present spiritual experience and the assurance that all is well with the world no matter what happens. Most of their lives are prescribed and they experience a connection with each other and a rare sense of belonging in the world.

It is also true that many members live in poverty and are on the government dole. Most do not engage in financially satisfying enterprise, and while their relationships are predictable, they do not communicate about what they really care about. They measure almost nothing and keeping their word about work obligations is a foreign idea. Their integrity with respect to spiritual values is extraordinary. Their energy in the world of work, measurement and the search for new possibilities is very low.

As Erving Polster** once said, “Therapy is always the opposite.”

* Serge Kahili King, *The Urban Shaman*

** Erving Polster; Personal Communication.