

A call for the

HIGH PERFORMANCE HUMAN WORKPLACE

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The Problem

Too many people in big corporations don't like to get up in the morning to go to work, and see their job primarily as a way to make money. They are neither passionate nor inspired and engagement is low. Despite programs that corporations use to get ahead of this issue, employee engagement mostly stays low or below expectations.

The current economic environment is tough in nearly all industries. The harder it is to survive, the more we seem to care for profit, process, and tools and the less affordable it seems to put energy into "people focus." People/Employee centered topics typically come "after" the other stuff gets done.

The Possibility:

Is it possible to drive high performance in sales and profit way beyond industry averages and at the same time drive high engagement in the workplace? I know that the answer is yes and have experienced it. The reason this not happening everywhere is that a fundamental shift in the perception of leaders is necessary. This shift is from seeing profit as the goal to profit as the result of meaningful things done in fulfilling ways.

Although this may sound improbable in the first place, the secret is found in corporate leaders becoming as fully responsible for Common Humanity in the workplace as they are for sustainable profit.

It's not about "either/or." It's about both at the same time.

Being responsible for both is one thing. The art is in knowing when each of both aspects needs most attention.

“Wall Street” or “People”

Most corporations around the world have huge issues around the engagement of their workforce. Most leaders have seen the evidence of highly engaged workforces driving better performance in sales and profit. But how do you drive engagement?

In looking at the corporate landscape, I found that companies drive two different types of culture. I'll give these cultures polarized names to make them easier to see.

Wall Street Culture:

Profit maximization is the primary context of the company, coming with long lists of key performance indicators, scorecards, control mechanisms for audit and compliance, process focus, and often using war-like language in the competitive context. I see this Wall Street culture as the main context of most large corporations. A lot of talented people leave large corporations after their “learning years,” because they are weary of the suppression.

People Culture:

People focus is the main context with values such as trust, creativity, innovation and vision. This culture is more often seen in entrepreneurial environments, non-profits, charities and start-ups. A frequent problem with “People Focus” companies is that while it feels great to work there and engagement is high, long-term performance of those companies is often at risk because of a lack of financial stability, operational excellence, and risk management.

By contrast, Wall Street Culture companies are challenged by low engagement and inconsistent performance in their workforce. Despite trying harder and harder, they fail to grow faster than the market.

CEOs and General Managers often dogmatically promote “it’s all about profit, shareholders, control, competitiveness” or “it’s all about people.” Big corporations tend toward a “Wall Street” context, even if their mission statements say otherwise. Employees, however, are very good at recognizing the truth of what leaders really stand for.

From a recruiting point of view it's relatively easy to find leaders that create a Wall Street context. The tough guys making it to the top have a hard time creating a sense of humanity in the workplace. People in corporations that drive a human team environment often lack the drive for operational excellence.

Honor “Wall Street” and “People”

I believe in the possibility of, and the need for, a corporate culture where the leaders honor the need for both profit, control and compliance alongside the need for expressions of Common Humanity, the experience of being cared for, where everybody aspires to bring out the best in each other. This includes a sense of community and having people feel like they are part of something meaningful.

The breakthrough needed is in having leaders become 100% responsible for both cultures at the same time rather than one at the expense of the other.

What's missing today is the leadership art of cultivating both profit and humanity in the workplace.

That is the focus of this paper.

At Novartis Canada, we have proven Seven Fundamental Changes are required for meaningful numbers of corporate leaders to create a High Performing Human Workplace. Each requires a personal transformation in which someone takes 100 percent responsibility for profit and:

1. Care and Community
2. Dreaming Big
3. Individual Growth
4. Noble Purpose
5. Trust
6. Truth Speaking
7. Commitment

Engagement goes down in most of the companies as a result of the above principles not being committed. The good news is: it doesn't cost anything. The bad news is: money can't buy it because it's not about tools and processes.

We offer here a Map. Which way you go is up to you.

**100 percent responsibility for CARING and COMMUNITY:
Creating a community of people that are for each other**

Whilst competition is an important driver of performance, it is not an attractive motivation to the majority of the workforce. Senior leaders that love the thrill of competition often lack awareness that competition threatens a lot of people who care more about doing a job well than competing. The fear of losing leads to “freezing” on the job. The secret to engagement is to create community within the corporation and a competitive edge with the outside world. Community is a deep need for most people. Without trusting that others care for them and for what they do and have to say, people don’t feel appreciated and withdraw one way or another. Leaders that care ask people what they are passionate about and what troubles them. They appreciate people in public – including and beyond their value to the business. Leaders that drive this value of “caring for each other” create a culture and community of high energy and engagement.

When caring is a genuine part of the culture, employees will themselves take ownership for a higher level of personal accountability. Where companies, divisions or plants fail, I look for where there is a lack of care in the first place. Imagine a factory where compliance is low, standard procedures have not been followed and a high quality mindset is missing. Talk to the employees and ask them how management cares for them. You will find a big part of the solution right here. In order to fix those issues typical management response looks for better processes and protocols, training for the workers and better role descriptions. This helps. But if there had been care in the first place, employees would probably have fixed things proactively because they cared. Where things are broken, employees know it, know how to fix it, and it’s usually the management who is surprised.

Another example comes from the CEO of a third party manufacturer I spoke to recently. He explained their company vision to me and explained how caring was a value. He explained how this relates to health and safety. It is a priority for the factory leadership team because they want the workers, the family fathers and mothers to come home safe. They deeply care for the employees and their families. Everyone feels responsible for this. He pointed out that he didn’t do it for the FDA nor for the local health authority but for the people. They would never have health and safety issues with the authorities because they deeply care in the first place.

It sounds natural to care for people. But it often isn't for many senior executives whose attention is elsewhere. The challenge for all of us is simple, but difficult. I know it's possible. I've seen it happen in my own company.

We just need a wakeup call.

DREAM BIG 100 percent responsibility for fostering a culture that invites people to explore the unknown

Many people in large corporations feel they have little power and little ability to have an impact on the way things are.

Something magical happens when I ask individuals and teams to dream something that doesn't already exist and for which they care deeply. But, allowing people to dream is not a corporate thing to do. It's normal to suggest goals and explain how you are going to achieve them. I will never understand how senior managers really believe that they will get innovation, something really new, if they expect people to keep doing what they know how to do. Innovation is new territory. The breakthrough for leaders is to stop unconsciously rewarding people for playing safe and thinking that they are more likely to be punished for failure than rewarded for thinking big.

Most employees, and leaders, learn to play within the cultural context that they have been given. To come up with ideas that may need more than the budgeted resources (money, people) are not the normal way of doing things. However, when you give people the room to dream, you create a culture that drives powerful requests to get those dreams realized. Allowing people to dream doesn't mean individuals can go crazy or exceed budgets without permission. It means that you create distinct opportunities where "the sky is the limit" and senior management is in the boat with employees to be part of a risk venture that might bring about a breakthrough.

Where people don't dream big, engagement is lower and results less than they could be.

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH:

**100 percent responsibility for creating opportunities for people to grow
as a human being**

Individual growth helps achieve better business results and helps people do things in ways that are more satisfying. We keep looking for ways for people to deliver without feeling suppressed, stressed or victimized. Personal growth, going beyond one's own self-limiting beliefs, is not usually a condition of employment in companies. We end up getting stuck with the limitations of our bosses and employees as well as our own. It's easier to talk about growth than be fully responsible for creating opportunities for people to grow as human beings and not simply as "human resources." This means going beyond sharing development opportunities and agreeing that there is a need for personal growth. The first step is for leaders to invite real personal growth commitments and demonstrate the ability to be committed to another person's success. This grows from boss to employee, amongst peers and from employee to boss.

NOBLE PURPOSE

100 percent responsibility for Value Creation Beyond Profit

In most companies profit maximization is the main context. The truth is that profit does not get most people engaged at all. It is also true that a company cannot exist without enough profit. But, profit is not a legitimate goal when it is in fact a result! Profit comes as an appreciation for services and products. People do not get engaged and energized in the presence of the profit motive. They engage from delivering something meaningful and having a meaningful experience. There is a story about a man at a building site who asks a worker, "What are you doing here?" The man answers, "I am building a wall." He asks the same questions to another builder, who answers, "I am building a Cathedral." That is the essence of engagement.

People engage when they experience value being created. They tell their friends they are creating meaningful products and services. They want to work with the pride that firemen have in saving lives. It's the leader's job to believe in something that attracts talented people and enroll others into it. The best leaders help the organization to find a deeper meaning in what the company does.

This is Noble Purpose.

Examples:

Banking sector

Instead of profit only: Giving credit allows entrepreneurs to realize their dreams and contribute to innovation in society.

Insurance

Instead of premium increase: Increasing quality of life by allowing people to focus on the possibilities in their live because their big worries are insured.

Computer

Instead of “Selling more computers”: Revolutionizing the access to communication and entertainment.

Pharmaceutical

Instead of “more blockbusters”: Increasing access in the world for Cures.”

Books

Instead of selling more books: Being the most customer oriented company in the world. (Amazon)

Noble Purpose is not jargon or a slogan. If it is not genuine it doesn't work. It starts in a leader's heart and mind. It is always available if you become 100 percent responsible for it in your company culture.

TRUST

100 percent responsibility for creating Trust as the foundation of the culture

People want to be empowered.

Employees and managers want to trust that:

- They can be more than a number.
- They are cared for when they care for the mission.
- They will not be punished for speaking the truth.
- They will feel support when being bold and exploring unknown territory.
- They can feel safe.

Trust means we let go of control more often. It means we say goodbye to the view of humans being as lazy and needing incentives to perform. Trust means we stop tolerating shallow relationships in corporations. I have evidence that there is a strong will in almost everybody to create something great and have an impact.

I believe that Trust is not a training problem but a commitment challenge for leaders. When a leader is 100% responsible for trust in a company, it appears.

TRUTH SPEAKING

**100 percent responsibility for allowing people to speak what's really
on their mind**

Issues can only be addressed in the daylight. If leaders won't allow the real truth to be discussed, the company gets stuck with mediocre relationships and performance.

Telling the truth is a huge challenge in companies because people are afraid to do it. There are many reasons for this and responsibility for it lies with individuals and leaders alike.

Managers often say they want to be updated on problems only in the company of solutions.

To be 100 percent responsible for Truth Speaking is to give full permission:

- To say what's not working without offering a solution.
- To declare issues that are outside one's own work area.
- To say what's present, real and true for oneself, in the moment in meetings and privately (e.g. "I feel that the energy is low right now in the room," or "I am not sure that we are aligned around this topic"...)

Employees can usually sense when the truth is being hidden.

COMMITMENT

100 percent responsibility for driving a culture in which people honor their word

Nothing great can happen unless people do what they say. This means 100 percent personal responsibility from leaders to a culture in which people honor their word. As good as this sounds, it is also rare. To honor your word is not the same as being satisfied with “trying your best.”

Ron Bynum said, in a personal communication, “Sometimes when people do not honor their word, they never gave it in the first place, but you thought they did. Honor is as good as it gets. Honor is the essence of respect. Life invites us to create a future that calls us forth with integrity, power and contribution. In responding to that invitation, you and I are embarking on a risky adventure; we already have high stakes in the game of being alive.

In those areas where our commitments call for extraordinary action, there is an extraordinary edge to be found in the power, the freedom, and the exhilaration of giving and living as our word. By giving and living as our word, you and I cease to be spectators; rather, our speaking becomes an action that begets action, and impacts the world. When you give your word you create a condition that supports your commitment, rather than merely accommodating your moods. When you honor your commitments over your preference of the moment – when you choose to do what you said solely because you said so – in that moment you are expressing yourself as action, rather than as a collection of mere ideas, wishes or dreams. In such moments, you find yourself producing results that seem discontinuous and unpredictable from the spectator's point of view. Giving your word has no particular rules to follow, no fall-back positions when the going gets tough. It provides no justification for your actions, no reasons for failure or success, no rationale to buttress the choices you've made. Yet, giving your word does provide access to the immense power of your own resources, to the inspiration and freedom available in committing yourself to what's possible, and placing your life in the service of that stand.”

In this, as well as the rest, I invite you to join me in being fully responsible for creating the High Performance Human Workplace.