

PeopleFocus

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Editor's Message

Singapore's economy is on the rebound; jobless rate expected to fall below 4 per cent later this year.

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The outlook for Singapore certainly appears good. The jobless rate is expected to fall below 4 per cent and growth is expected to be close to 9 per cent for the year. Companies have hired more workers in the second quarter but are still keen to keep operating costs down.

In his National Day dinner speech at his Tanjong Pagar ward, Minister Mentor Lee announced that the future is bright and that Singaporeans have many reasons to be confident about it, provided they are prepared to meet setbacks from time to time, by changing, adapting and moving forward.

In this issue of the **PeopleFocus** newsletter, we take a look at how companies should focus on developing skills and career paths, recognise workers in sincere and meaningful ways and build on self-esteem, to reap the benefits of a positive, loyal and motivated workforce.

The **PeopleFocus** newsletter aims to provide informative articles and resources to organisations to help improve performances and to individuals to develop their personal effectiveness in career and life goals.

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Disconnect: Exploring the Emotional Connection to Work

Developing and recognising workers will reap the benefits of a positive, loyal and motivated workforce.

About a year ago, human resources consultancy Towers Perrin created quite a stir when it revealed its newest study showing the deep emotional connection that workers have with their work - and clearly documented just how negative those emotions are for most workers.

But as Singapore's economic recovery continues, can we assume that our workers are going to become more positive about their work life?



Not likely, according to Towers Perrin analysts, who see the negative factors as being more deep and durable than could be explained by simple economic uncertainty.

"Companies dependent on their people's skills - as most are today - may face real risk when the economy improves and top talent begins looking for greener pastures," says Donald Lowman, a managing director of Towers Perrin.

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Managers have to be more focused than ever on keeping the right people, and keeping their team motivated as the economy turns around.

Strong (and Mostly Negative) Emotions

Using sophisticated market research techniques that actually measure the intensity of emotion, Towers Perrin surveyed 1,100 workers in mid-sized and large companies. So instead of the usual “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” scales, workers’ feelings toward job recognition, for example, could be directly compared to their feelings about their workload.

Overall the study showed that workers have a tremendously strong emotional connection to their job - both positive and negative. More importantly, the overall emotional balance was negative, and one-third of the emotional content was “intensely” negative. The key factors were:

- An excessive workload
- Concerns about management’s ability to lead the company
- Anxiety about the future, particular longer-term job, income and retirement security
- Lack of challenge, which intensified the frustration about the workload
- Insufficient recognition for the level of contribution and effort, and concern that pay isn’t commensurate with performance.

Of course, it’s not all bad. Workers had strongly positive emotions around their sense of self-esteem that comes from their work, from other people at the workplace, and from their ability to see the results of their work. Though these factors were overshadowed by the negative ones, they were nevertheless strongly positive and added significantly to the overall emotional content of people’s relationship with their jobs.

How to Redirect This Emotional Energy

What can you do to redirect this emotional energy from the negative to the positive side of the ledger? For starters, get your own emotion “antennae” tuned into what’s going on with your workers.

In order to assess just how in touch managers are with their workers, Towers Perrin also surveyed 300 managers for their *predictions* of how their employees would respond. The managers predicted fairly accurately just how negative the workforce is, and they accurately gauged the workload issue.

But they missed most of the rest of the important factors - both positive and negative - and often by a mile.

The bottom line? Managers and companies that focus on developing skills and a career path, recognising workers in sincere and meaningful ways and building on self-esteem, will reap the benefits of a positive, loyal and motivated workforce. ■

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Employees: Who are we looking for?

A recent survey cited the top three capabilities that employers seek when hiring new employees:

- strong communication skills
- a positive attitude
- a team player

Perhaps these are not too surprising. But the next three sought-after qualities were more interesting and perhaps indicative of how the business world is changing.

Number four was “flexibility,” which is understandable since people entering the work force today must realise that there is no “iron rice bowl.” Workers must constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to thrive. They will change not only jobs, but careers, several times during the course of their working lives.

“Problem-solving skills” ranked five, with “thinking outside of the box” coming close in sixth. These qualities support the fact that business people now realise they must be more than merely providers of goods or services. In effect, they must be providers of solutions, with the goal of fully understanding the needs of their customers, then finding creative ways to meet them. ■

“Success is more a function of consistent common sense than it is of genius.”

- An Wang, 1920-1990, founder of Wang Laboratories

Be Real

If you're not being real you're not being yourself, and your integrity is compromised.

So many of the problems that individuals and groups have in getting along, getting things done, and being happy has to do with dishonesty and withholding. We are often so concerned about presenting the "image" that we think others want to see, that the "real" you sometimes gets lost in the fog.

And as you lose yourself in the image you project, you also lose touch with what you need and want to be happy. Then it becomes natural to project your failings and pain on those around you, whom you were trying to please by being someone you thought they wanted you to be.

We are often so concerned about presenting the "image" that we think others want to see, that the "real" you sometimes gets lost in the fog.

For one to be an effective instrument of a healthy group process, you need to "get over yourself." This doesn't mean that you need to be perfect, having handled all of your issues. But it does mean that you accept yourself, "flaws and all" and be a model of truth telling.

People seldom venture to express their truth in group settings. Your modelling of this practice may take your group to a whole new level of potential, performance, and fulfilment.

Example

OK. So you're up in front of a group and everything's fine when all of a sudden the worst happens: You completely forget where you were going and haven't a clue what to say next. Now this may go against all of your past reasoning and education, but I urge you to try it nonetheless. **Tell the truth!**

Talk to the audience as if you were talking to a friend, laugh at yourself, tell them what you're thinking, and at some point, you'll find what you wanted to say, or something MUCH more profound will show up in your awareness as you just simply surrender to who you are in the moment.

For example, "Well folks, I just know I had some great ideas to share with you, and I was hoping to dazzle you

with my brilliance so that you'd be impressed with me. But for some reason, right now I have no clue what I was going to say."

To be an effective instrument of a healthy group process, you need to "get over yourself."

Practice

Practise acceptance of who you are, your values, strengths, and weaknesses, by publicly acknowledging or expressing something you normally wouldn't to at least one other person today. Notice how you feel, then write about it in your journal. ■

Beyond The Box

The following questions are designed to broaden perspectives, to open vistas, to widen the lens. There is no one right way to approach them. You can journal about them, talk to friends and/or co-workers, create art, ponder them while driving, and talk to your dog or cat, whatever helps you explore "outside the box."

1. What's the relationship between so-called "people skills" and professional excellence?
2. Where in my professional life am I showing up, and where am I not showing up?
3. What is my example telling others with whom I work?
4. What does it cost me when fear stops me?
5. What am I willing to let fear decide?
6. How does my relationship with money mirror my relationship with other aspects of my life (partnership, sex, work, play, etc.)?
7. What would it mean about me if I had a great relationship with money?
8. What am I trying to buy with money (safety, status, love, happiness, etc.) and how is it working? ■

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Be A Leading Communicator

Clued up and successful managers and supervisors make it a regular practice to communicate openly with their staff. There are times, however, when we think we're communicating, when in fact our messages are falling through the cracks.



To avoid these communication chasms, consider the following "Five C's" of effective communication:

Be Clear. Use language that is easy to understand, avoid vague terminology and, if possible, provide concrete examples. If necessary, plan in advance what you need to say, to avoid backtracking and longer-than-necessary explanations. Ask questions after your message is relayed to help ensure complete understanding.

Be Consistent. Avoid sending mixed signals. When you do need to deliver two seemingly conflicting messages, do your best to explain the discrepancy. For example, "I know this seems to contradict our discussion last week about cutting costs, but this is an

investment in our future growth that can't be delayed, because....."

Be Convincing. As a leader, part of your responsibility is to increase peoples' willingness to act (as opposed to forcing their compliance). Your ability to persuade others is enhanced not only by what you say, but by the way you say it and the example you set on a daily basis.

Be Constant. A good rule of thumb is to over-communicate. Important messages may need to be repeated a number of times and in different ways to get the point across.

Be Co-operative. A manager needs the ability to convey ideas, knowledge and skills to others, but it is equally important that he or she is an outstanding listener. Through active listening, you can gauge whether or not your message is getting through and you stand to learn a great deal from it too. ■

"Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people."

- William Butler Yeats, 1865-1939

About Us



Lionel L Lim is the founder of Aurora Executive Solutions (AES), a Human Talent Management and Development Solutions firm. He is a US-certified EQ trainer, a career and life coach, a People's Association approved trainer, and a licensed facilitator of the Profiles occupational assessments. Lionel is also an experienced facilitator of the EQ Map, the Emotional Intelligence Style Inventory, MBTI tools and the INSIGHT Inventory.

Lionel is a graduate of the University of South Australia with a BA in Communication and Media Management. He also holds a Diploma in Training and a Certificate in Counselling Skills. Lionel has a varied experience in executive search, communication, leadership, training, coaching and mentoring, as well as the effective management of teams in both local and overseas assignments.

Lionel is a professional member of the Asian Association of Career Management Professionals, the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Network, the Career Planning and Adult Development Network, the National Resume Writers' Association and the International Association of Coaches.

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