

Creating A Culture of Opportunity - By Jack Turesky, The Hamister Group, Inc. with Nektaria Hamister
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What is the best way to maintain your Peak Performers? Create a Culture of Opportunity, an environment in which co-workers assertively seek increased responsibility and promotion.

Whenever other senior managers ask my advice on how to foster such a culture, I advise them to do two things: firstly, assume personal responsibility. Recognize that the the basis of such a Culture is your own behavior and attitude toward co-workers. Secondly, make and regularly renew a personal commitment to the practices below:

Delegation - Our company promotes delegation even to the lowest levels of the organization hierarchy. We do not only delegate tasks, but also accountability and responsibility. This promotes the development of management and leadership skills at all levels.

Encouragement to Lead Change - Knowing that change is inevitable, we encourage our co-workers to lead change by drawing on their differing educational backgrounds, job experiences, and strengths. We allow co-workers latitude to make reasonable mistakes in their pursuit of improvement and innovation without fear of punishment. Our management helps co-workers to move past failures to future successes.

Listening - One of the most difficult challenges of being a manager is listening well. It's the communication skill in which we have had the least amount of formal training. Our minds inevitably wander because our thought speed is faster than the speaking speed of the people we are listening to. Senior managers have a lot on their minds, so listening to the individual issues of each co-worker can be tiring. If you don't devote your full attention to speakers, however, you will ultimately lose more time. Conversations will need to be repeated, good ideas will be lost, and problems will worsen.

Speaking with Respect - The behavior of senior management toward associates plays a crucial role in their desire to contribute to the company. Co-workers can become very discouraged if you make a habit of speaking to them in a condescending and demeaning manner. It's tough to watch yourself carefully when you have so many responsibilities and tasks, but you will ultimately create more work for yourself and add to your own stress if you don't control your manners. Peak Performers, who might someday lighten your management burdens, will either leave your company or disengage from their work. They will stop striving for success and simply follow a routine. So make a personal commitment to treat all of your staff with respect.

Avoiding Micro-Management - I believe that micro-management is perhaps the #1 reason organizations lose their peak performers. We expect Senior Management to define the What, Who and When, while allowing others to define the How. We have centralized concepts, standards, and values, but we encourage decentralized implementation.

Training - Training can be internal and external. Most small to medium size companies I am familiar with don't do enough training. We are continually looking for improved training methods and plan to make a renewed effort in 2007. Peak Performers always want to increase their knowledge and skills. We therefore have to provide training opportunities in order to maintain our Peak Performers.

Public Celebration of Success - Positive reinforcement can be very powerful. Think of the last time you received a compliment...I know it made me feel terrific. We try to celebrate the successes of our co-workers both inside and outside the company. Everyone performs better when they feel that they are appreciated and valued.

Constructive Criticism in Private - We give constructive criticism privately and take care to mix it with praise for work well done. We are careful not to criticize the person, but the issue. It is also very important to offer help if needed.

Internal Promotion - Peak Performers need to know that they can continue to grow and advance within their organization. They deserve to be rewarded with promotion when appropriate opportunities arise. Our Company is committed to promoting from within the organization whenever possible.

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