

Diversity News

September 2007

Yvonne: In previous editions of Diversity News, we've talked about the Government Accountability Office report on Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples

In that report, GAO defined diversity management as “a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment... where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued... so that ALL can reach their potential and maximize their contributions to an organization's strategic goals and objectives.”

Thomas: The BOTTOM LINE for diversity management is OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE—for individual employees, for work groups and teams, for offices, and for the organization overall. A goal which SHOULD be shared by managers at all levels of the organization. And yet, the biggest roadblock to diversity and inclusion, according to a recent report by the Conference Board, is middle management.

Yvonne: In THIS edition of Diversity News, we'll take a look at some of the principles of effective management, in order to demonstrate how diversity management, with its emphasis on flexibility and inclusion, fits into the larger picture of management best practices.

There's no shortage of “how-to” guides on effective management: from Tom Peters' “In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies,” to Jim Collins' “Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap, and Others Don't,” to Steven Covey's “The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness,” and countless others.

In addition, each year Fortune magazine identifies the 100 best companies to work for in America.

Now Craig Hickman has drawn on all of these sources (and more) for his book, “Management Malpractice: How to Cure Unhealthy Management Practices that Disable Your Organization.”

Hickman has selected 25 management principles that have been identified by other management gurus.

These are the principles that he believes are most commonly malpracticed. Hickman has divided these principles into five categories:

- Innovation and Creative Imaginings.
- Individuals and Employees.
- Corporate Culture and Structure.
- Interpersonal Relationships and Teams. And
- Visionary Leadership and Strategy.

Thomas: In the category of “Innovation and Creative Imaginings,” Hickman describes these principles of effective management:

- Develop a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The greatest obstacles to progress are old habits and viewpoints, old approaches and methodologies, old systems and structures, and old paradigms.

Fostering a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo helps to overcome the limits of the past in order to improve performance in the present (and in the future).

Dissatisfaction with the status quo leads to new ideas, innovation, and improved processes.

- Share ideas of every kind at every level.

Encouraging the full and rigorous sharing of ideas of every kind, at every level, without constraint or limitation, helps to maximize commitment, collaboration, cooperation, coordination, and the creation of value.

- Constantly challenge assumptions and biases.

Challenging long-held assumptions and biases is never easy, but it is necessary in order to remain adaptive, resilient, flexible, and agile in a world that is constantly changing.

- Commit to rethinking the world.

Encourage EVERY employee to think critically, creatively, and constantly about everything they do in the organization and everything the organization does for them.

Ask all employees to question everything until they find better ways of working, better ways of creating value, and better ways of getting results.

When people rethink how they do things (and how the organization does things) and then implement their new ideas, they feel more powerful and become more productive.

- Dream and imagine that anything is possible.

Allocate the time and resources for employees to brainstorm, to dream, to imagine new products, new processes, and new ways of doing business.

Let them close the gap between how they currently work and how they dream of working.

Yvonne: In the category of “Individuals and Employees,” Hickman describes these principles of effective management:

- Treat employees as your most valuable asset.

Treat ALL employees as your most valuable asset, not just the “A” players, the “go-getters” at the top of the organizational chart. But the “B” players, as well:

That is, the workhorses, the soldiers, the employees who turn management’s visions into reality. And reward employees for their productivity, not for their position or their personality.

- Respect others and their individuality.

Create opportunities for employees to express esteem and appreciation for one another.

For example, using a 360-degree review process can provide feedback to employees on how their behavior, attitudes, beliefs, style, perspective, and overall effectiveness is perceived and valued by others.

- Accept responsibility for your actions.

Establish an environment in which mistakes can be openly discussed, acknowledged, and used as learning tools for identifying meaningful solutions.

Provide feedback constantly and reward outstanding examples of taking responsibility with special recognition and rewards.

- Value the contributions of each employee.

Every employee contribution must be properly valued if employees are to increase their competency and their level of performance.

Valuing the contribution of each employee includes placing people in positions where their attributes and competencies can be best utilized.

- Establish a balance between work and your personal life.

In an economy where attracting, developing, retaining, and making the most of talent is becoming increasingly difficult, success depends on improving human resource management.

Organizations that fail to help their employees achieve a balance between their work and personal lives will ultimately fall behind in the race for talent.

But organizations that actively support and encourage innovative approaches to work/life balance will create work environments that attract and retain the best people.

Thomas: In the category of “Corporate Culture and Structure,” Hickman describes these principles of effective management:

- Create an environment where people feel free to raise concerns.

That is, a genuinely open environment in which opinions are respected, ideas are vigorously debated, and judgments are reserved.

This creates a vital system of checks and balances for business decisions.

- Represent the diversity of the world you serve.

Fully embracing diversity can strengthen team cohesiveness, generate innovative thinking, promote better understanding of customer differences, and motivate individual employees to higher levels of achievement.

If meaningful inter-connections between diverse individuals are NOT properly defined and facilitated, the power, talent, capability, and potential of employees will never be fully tapped.

- Create a foundation of trust.

Trust begins with honest feedback. AND with the removal of fear.

Also important for increasing trust is the recognition that mistakes are made every day at every level of the organization, and that accountability—not blame or punishment—is the way to foster trust and to promote improved performance.

- Develop a passion for learning.

Everything that happens in an organization either nurtures or frustrates learning—every action, communication, plan, policy, procedure, process, strategy, and system.

The secret to cultivating a passion for learning lies in doing more things to NURTURE it than to FRUSTRATE it.

Learning can only be nurtured through honesty, openness, encouragement, flexibility, humility, forgiveness, and trust.

- Eliminate organizational barriers.

Search for, identify, and remove the organizational barriers that get in the way of performance, creativity, communication, and problem solving.

Get rid of the rules, the policies, the procedures, the processes, and the systems that frustrate your people and prevent them from getting their jobs done and achieving organizational objectives.

Yvonne: In the category of “Interpersonal Relationships and Teams,” Hickman describes these principles of effective management:

- Provide employees with meaningful work opportunities.

Work increases in meaning for people when they feel a sense of belonging, when they feel supported by their team, when they can be creative and innovative in the performance of their work, when they can see clear evidence of their contributions, and when they receive adequate recognition and reward for their efforts.

- Clearly communicate expectations.

Discuss, clarify, and agree upon all expectations related to performance, to priorities, to results, and to success.

And clarify expectations at every level: organizational expectations, management expectations, customer expectations, other stakeholder expectations, and individual employee’s expectations, too.

- Enable people to tap into their full potential.

As Hickman points out, attracting the right people has become a higher priority for today’s organizations; and retaining them depends, now more than ever, on putting them into the right jobs at the right time—so that their development and their contributions to value creation can be maximized.

- Become an ethical role model for other employees.

Managers should not abuse their power or position by hiding or justifying their unethical behavior—for example: taking greater liberties, enjoying more flexibility, controlling too much information, making false claims, or justifying personal biases.

Managers should live the same ethical standards that they expect from others.

- Listen to all viewpoints.

Most strategic mistakes result from one of two fundamental failures:

The failure to consider a broader and more expansive range of alternatives before selecting a strategic direction, or the failure to consider the full context and extent of implications associated with implementing a particular strategy.

Promoting an attitude of listening to all viewpoints will help create an open “anything’s possible” culture that fosters creativity, innovation, and better strategic decision-making.

Thomas: In the category of “Visionary Leadership and Strategy,” Hickman describes these principles of effective management:

- Use the advantages of size to take risks.

Large organizational size promotes bureaucracy, not risk-taking. People must be drawn out of their comfort zones.

Help them acknowledge and accept the fears they have about leaving their comfort zones, and encourage them to leave their comfort zones frequently—for example, by working on different assignments or on interdepartmental teams.

- Do what matters most.

Doing what matters most is a lot easier when organizations make abundantly clear what results are expected.

Managers can build a commitment to the principle of doing what matters most by defining and communicating it, clearly and comprehensively.

Then, clarify the results that the organization wants and expects.

- Create a clear vision of where you’re going.

True visions motivate people, lead them to stretch themselves, to accomplish far more than they would have accomplished without the vision.

True visions create a passion in people that allow them to guide and develop themselves. And that’s the best indicator of a truly great organization.

- Solve customer problems.

Ask your customers how they would like to do business with you.

Ask them what they would like to change about your products or services.

Ask them about emerging problems that are not being addressed.

- Lead the way through change.

Change is the essence of leadership, and the ABILITY to lead depends on the WILLINGNESS to change.

Leaders must learn to change perspectives, overcome biases, learn new skills, embrace new ideas, reshape beliefs, drop old habits, question convention, and reject orthodoxy.

Leaders who embrace change, reinvent themselves, and constantly look at new alternatives are the key to future organizational success.

Thomas: Every one of the 25 management principles that Hickman describes overlaps to some degree with diversity best practices, especially the importance of visionary leadership.

Yvonne: In future editions of Diversity News, we'll be talking more about the importance of leadership, but that's all we have time for in this edition of Diversity News.

We appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

Thomas: Until then, for more frequent updates of diversity news, sign up for our free weekly e-mail news service: NewsLink.

Just send an e-mail message to the address shown below, with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWS in the subject line.

Yvonne: And check out our bimonthly newsletter, Diversity@Work, available as a download on our Web site or by e-mail from our office.

Also, we want to hear from you!

If you'd like to share your story ideas, comments, or suggestions, please e-mail us at dmeeo@va.gov with the words DIVERSITY NEWS in the subject line.

Until next time...

Both: Have a great month!