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People Drive Numbers

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Nourish the Culture

Stop obsessing over numbers.



by Jon Gordon

IF YOU ARE IN A FUNK AND can't seem to pull out of it, you may be focused on the wrong things. By building engaged relationships, you can revitalize your culture and build a winning team.

Despite all the hopeful talk of recovery, we are still stuck in the recession muck, trying to survive the *new normal*—working twice as hard for the same (or worse) results. The anxiety is almost palpable—and performance is suffering.

Most managers are so busy they can't slow down to worry about a little thing, like how employees feel. That's the problem. How employees feel collectively adds up to culture, and culture isn't a little thing—it's what will pull you out of its slump—or not.

For years, managers focused on the numbers, and the numbers were good. So morale was up. But then the recession hit, and the numbers went down, along with morale, engagement, and performance. *Managing by the numbers* isn't working anymore. Trying to meet the same numbers and failing creates fear. *Managers need to change their focus*, but most don't know where to begin.

The new focus should be on culture, purpose, morale, and loyalty. All of that boils down to engaged relationships. These are interactive, collaborative, meaningful, and essential: To effectively lead, coach, work with, or live with someone, you must know them and have a strong bond with them. No matter how busy you are, you're not too busy to create these bonds.

I see a clear connection between engaged relationships and a nourishing culture. Here are three key insights on building engaged relationships:

1. Business and stress sabotage our efforts to build engaged relationships. With projects to complete, to-do lists to accomplish, goals to hit, and outcomes to achieve, life can feel like you are on a runaway bus. And instead of taking the time to get people on your bus, you run them over. You become so focused on creating success that you don't make the time to develop the relationships that lead to sustainable success. In times of stress, the brain goes into survival mode; you stop thinking about serving other people, mentoring them, and helping them thrive.

Just when you need to be the most engaging, you become the least engaging. What your people need the most, you're delivering the least. And so the problems multiply. It's a vicious cycle.

2. Where there's a void in communication, negativity fills it. These are uncertain times. Employees are wondering what will happen next, whether their job will be impacted, what action to take. *Uncertainty creates a void.* Unless you fill the void with clear and positive communication, people assume the worst. Fear and negativity creep in and dominate their thoughts, behaviors, and actions. In uncertainty, you need to communicate with transparency, authenticity, and clarity. Even when the news is negative, you can communicate it positively: Tell the truth, give them a plan, and help them believe, we can turn this around.

3. Employees need nourishment in order to thrive. Every employee wants to know, "Do you care about me; can I trust you?" If yes, they'll be more likely to work with you. Employees who feel

cared for, honored, and nourished are more engaged in what they're doing. Learn to view your employees like a functional family. This will change the way you treat them. You'll see them as people who deserve your trust and love and require communication, transparency, and authenticity from you. Be someone they can trust, and take the actions necessary to earn it.

Amid all of this talk of engaged relationships and nourishment, you can't ignore the numbers (numbers are indicators of success). Just know they are a byproduct of your culture, leadership, morale, engagement, and execution.

It is not the numbers that drive people—people and relationships drive numbers. Don't get so busy trying to achieve success that you forget to take the time to develop the relationships that lead to success. Relationships are the bedrock on which winning teams are built SSE

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ACTION: Nourish your culture.

SERVICE/EXCELLENCE

Service at a Premium Customers are willing to pay more.



by Zach Conen

IF YOU PUT CUSTOMER SERVICE on a pedestal as a core component of your offering—and mean it—you'll like *The American Express Global Customer Service Barometer*. It reveals on one hand that consumers are willing to pay a 10-percent premium for what they consider excellent service, and on the other hand may defect over a single negative experience.

If you consider service excellence to be a pillar of your offering but struggle to put a number on it, this is a soothing headline. If you have long wished to make service a priority but have been thwarted by those demanding a hard-and-fast return, this is a strong future argument (even before you begin calculating the lifetime value of that customer or the cost of acquiring new customers in the instance of customer defection).

The study provides reassurance that service is important and that service is a worthwhile investment, but also leaves open the question: *what exactly is excellent service?* The answer, of course, differs by industry, company, brand, and target market. Defining how you



deliver excellence is the art in customer experience delivery, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" way of getting there.

However, you can ask yourself three questions:

- **Is there someone in your organization who is responsible for the customer, across departments?** Not a head of customer service that handles issues in a call center, but someone who serves as the customer ombudsmen for

the entire lifetime of the relationship?

- **Are you actively measuring performance**, both on the customer sentiment side (i.e., voice of customer feedback, surveys, communities) and the operational compliance/service delivery sides (quality assurance evaluations, mystery shopping). What are you doing with this data?

- **If you walked up to a line employee in your company, would they be able to articulate clearly what is expected of them in terms of serving the customer?** Would they be able to do it?

How you answer those questions provides insight into what size fits you, and how close you are to making that fit. It isn't always easy or quick, but it's well worth it. SSE

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