Focus

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Send Every Employee Home a Winner

One of my clients recently described an employee engagement philosophy that is wonderfully simple and effective – thanks, Pete! Nothing worthwhile is easy, but Pete's concept is flexible and can scale from a young entry level person to a senior manager. Leaders will improve productivity and reduce turnover when their overarching goal is for each employee to leave work every day feeling like a winner.

Here's why leaving work a winner is important.

➤ Your sense of accomplishment (self-worth, making a difference, being part of something bigger than yourself) will carry over into the transition from work to home. Your spouse or roommate doesn't want to deal with a grump. So your home life is better.

➤ A better home life means you bring fewer problems and concerns to work. That reduces distractions.

➤ Feeling like a winner is highly addictive. Employees will work harder and stay longer at a job that supplies the human need for accomplishment, respect, and meaning.

This feeling of accomplishment is especially important to younger employees.

What does it take to feel like a winner? First, knowing that you achieved that day's goals, both individual and team. This, of course, requires clear-cut daily and longer-term objectives, appropriate for the person and circumstances. Daily goals should be achievable, and must be measurable to have meaning. For example, let's say an apprentice electrician was given a box of fifty receptacles and told his goal was to install them by the end of that workday. At quitting time the novice electrician would know exactly where he stood. Even if he had five receptacles left in the box, he might think, "I may have fallen a little short today, but I learned some things and tomorrow I'm confident I'll reach fifty and maybe more!"

Any and every employee can and should have daily goals. When multiple objectives are present, pick one that above everything else should be accomplished – *no matter what* – that day. This helps avoid that fuzzy headed feeling at 5:00 p.m. most of us have experienced of, "Mercy, what a day! What did I accomplish?"

An important second factor is performance feedback. People want to know where they stand compared to standards and expectations. Imagine how demoralizing a job would be if you didn't know how your accomplishments affected the organization. [Personal goals that clearly connect to organization goals are called "line of sight goals."]

The beauty of Pete's simple objective, and why I used the term "overarching goal" in the first paragraph, is the rigorous management discipline required to carry this out. For example, you need:

- ✓ A clear and motivational organizational purpose, understood by all employees. *Hint:* Making money is inadequate, except in a few cases with a lone wolf and self-centered culture.
- ✓ Robust two-way communication, up, down, and sideways
- ✓ Meaningful metrics (and not too many), so that each employee can understand his/her progress and overall progress
- ✓ Supervisors who understand how to lead, support, develop, and fire people

✓ A hiring policy characterized by a narrow front door and a very wide back door. That is, hire selectively and correct your hiring mistakes quickly.

Finally, seek opportunities to break big goals into smaller ones and thereby create more opportunities for wins. It's not intuitive, but you can actually improve performance by *lowering* the bar, not raising it, when you add more steps to that 10-foot ladder. How do you eat an elephant?

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Pictured: The Ladner triplets and Tristan after a cooking class

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