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# Focus

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To Infinity, and Beyond!

Buzz Lightyear, a *Toy Story* character, leaps into action saying, "To infinity and beyond!" Of course, *Toy Story* was just the first of a string of blockbusters from Pixar Animation and Walt Disney Animation Studios. In an industry characterized by hits and flops, one wonders how Pixar keeps the string going.

Well, the magic pixie dust, as described by Pixar's president, is a focus on people. Pixar's leaders have created a culture that engages and energizes employees, based on three principles.

**ONE:** Care about people first. After making *Toy Story 2*, Pixar's leaders realized that they had put moviemaking ahead of the wellbeing of employees. This wake-up call came when an exhausted animator forgot to drop his infant child off at day care and left him in the car parked in the broiling Pixar parking lot. Fortunately, the child survived.

It's a leader's responsibility to protect his followers **from** pursuing excellence at all costs.

The best people will not be attracted to or remain with a company that ignores their welfare.

EVERY business needs creativity to survive, much less prosper, in today's economy. Since new ideas come from people, people should come first.

**TWO:** Focus on a purpose that makes people feel proud. Pixar's purpose is to make great films, and they clearly communicate this. Your company purpose might be constructing great buildings or improving people's lives through excellence in design. Whatever your purpose, it should attract and energize the right employees for your organization.

Putting purpose -- not profits -- first is the key. Here's how one commentator described Pixar: "*When Pixar focuses on making great films, profit follows. Focusing on profit first would lead to **compromising the purpose and sucking the passion and energy out of the***

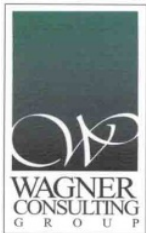
**organization.** *[Emphasis added] This seems simple on the surface, yet how many leaders truly understand this and act upon it?"*

**THREE:** Encourage self-expression and diversity of thought. Surveys consistently reveal that most employees feel that senior management does not value their opinions and ideas. Good leaders proactively seek out employee attitudes and create systems that encourage a rich dialog and reward creativity.

In addition to fostering a culture of innovation, smart leaders use employees to leverage their capabilities. For example, I recently witnessed a leader, who personally knew little about social media, engage in a discussion on that subject with a diverse group of managers and staff. Many specific opportunities in both employee recruitment and business development bubbled up from this conversation, and the segment ended with a new social media development champion whose mandate was to assemble a team and report back to the leader in a month.

So, leaders, launch your company To Infinity and Beyond!

*Tom*



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