JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage   *November 2022*

Mobley's Musings- Growth Comes from Mistakes

Several of my clients are self-critical. When they get feedback, they speed over the positive comments and agonize over the negative ones. Then they beat themselves up for mistakes they made. Since we are unable to correct past mistakes, why not think of them as learning and put in place strategies to not make that mistake again.

If you already knew how to do something, you wouldn't make a mistake. And, if you aren't making any mistakes, you probably aren't learning and growing.

When we are hard on ourselves, we tend to be hard on others. I believe that everyone is doing the best he or she can at any given moment.

And I have seen that in my clients. If we give ourselves the grace to realize that we are human and that being human means we aren't perfect, we have more energy for learning. Putting your focus on how to improve rather than torturing yourself about a mistake will make you happier and more effective.

Let your theme song be the one from the movie 'Frozen' – "Let it go." Move forward in a positive and cheerful way to learn and grow.

Ask Sandy
Killing Their Careers with Kindness

Is it possible to be too kind when it comes to managing direct reports? Sharmilla can't bring herself to fire an underperforming manager who misses deadlines, tramples across organizational boundaries, and generally creates drama wherever she goes. Sharmilla defends the manager by noting she has had health issues in the last few years, but her poor performance predates her health problems. Another manager has had to pick up the slack and now he's feeling burned out, undervalued, and taken advantage of. He is a flight risk and Sharmilla can't afford to lose him.

In my years as a manager and coach, I have seen this situation too many times. As a manager, when I saw someone was unable do their job, I felt the kind thing to do was to either change the scope of the job to match their abilities (and possibly reduce their compensation) or share the difficult message that they weren't working out and needed to find another job. In almost every case, the person knew they were failing but lacked the courage to leave until they had no other choice. In time, they were able to regroup, redefine what success looked like for them, and find a job where they could thrive. They felt relieved to be forced to go.

Can you imagine the emotional anguish of going to a job every day knowing you are underperforming but you're too afraid to look for another job? After he was fired, Kurt came to me and explained that the year he spent trying to make the job work took a toll on his self-esteem. The harder he worked to succeed only to fail again, the more he felt like a failure as a human being. At home he was unpleasant to his wife and children; he feared his family would leave him. When he finally got fired, it was a relief he said.

Kurt and I spent time clarifying his strengths and identifying qualities that made him unsuccessful in his job. It turned out that Kurt was a great implementer of someone else's vision, but he couldn't come up with the strategy or vision on his own. He had years of success bringing projects to fruition, but he struggled when he had to come up with the ideas.

Remembering that he had been successful in the past and taking stock of his strengths went a long way to rebuilding Kurt's self-esteem. We revised his resume to emphasize his strengths and he applied for jobs that aligned with them. It took a few months, but he landed a job where he is doing well and has a career path that doesn't require skills in strategy. When we reflected on his experience and what he learned he said his key takeaway is to recognize when the job isn't working and have the courage to leave. And, he said as a manager, he will be direct and clear with his staff on their performance and not excuse poor performance.

If you're reluctant to let go of an underperforming team member, you probably are not doing them, their careers, or your organization any favors. Letting them go may feel harsh at the time, but it often turns out to be the kindest cut of all.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com

Inner Reflection: Are You Happy?

In seeking "juicy" workplaces where my clients would excel, I realize that one size—or juiciness—doesn't fit all. Some companies are known for their creativity and innovation, like Apple and Facebook. Others, like Google and Spotify, describe their workplaces as technology playgrounds. And others simply emphasize having fun, like Zappos. My goal is to match a client's vision of happiness as an employee to a company's commitment and approach to achieving it.

While working with Nannette Bowler, the innovative Director of the Department of Family Services in Fairfax County, VA., I was reminded of the importance of happiness in a healthy workplace. Using as a foundation the book *First, Break All the Rules* from the Gallup organization, she created a leadership academy to develop the next generation of leaders. Each class is divided into learning teams of five to six people that are then tasked with examining one of the department's strategic goals or key initiatives.

One class was given the challenge to explore why happiness matters and what it would take to create a culture of happiness at the department.

Among the findings, a team noted that just talking about what contributes to happiness makes a person happy. That finding echoes the notion that what we focus our attention on influences our outlook. For example, if we observe many bad drivers on the road we feel negative about driving. But if we notice how many drivers use turn signals, obey speed limits and allow other drivers to merge into their lanes, we have a more positive view of driving. Nothing changed —it's the same road with the same drivers— except what we paid attention to.

Data on happiness are compelling and not surprising. Shawn Anchor, author of *The Happiness Advantage*, quantified the benefits of a happy company. Customer service increases by 37%, productivity by 31% and accuracy on tasks improves by 19%. The UK-based iOpener Institute for People and Performance found that happy employees take fewer sick days, stay twice as long in their jobs as their least happy colleagues, spend twice as much time at work focused on what they are paid to do, and believe they are achieving their potential twice as much as least happy coworkers.

Back at Fairfax County's Department of Family Services, the academy teams asked staff members what makes them happy at work. None of the respondents mentioned salary ...

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