

Chapter Eight Exercises

Exercise One

Sometimes the true purpose of a business can get lost in between the deadlines, the deliverables and the daily reports. It's time to move that back to the forefront, and make it the centerpiece for everything you do.

Bring together a group of leaders to brainstorm and discuss the answers to these questions.

Why are we in business? (Hint: think beyond making money!)

Why do we do what we do?

What propels us to do this better than anyone else?

What's the meaning behind our success?

How well do we project that meaning, internally and externally?

How well do we communicate that purpose to our employees?

If you don't already have a clear purpose statement, use your answers to craft one. Here are a few examples that might be helpful.

Dove: Achieving real beauty and encouraging women to love themselves

Patagonia: Inspiring and implementing sustainability in the outdoor industry

Crayola: Fostering creativity in children

Coca-Cola: Spreading and sharing happiness

Atkins & Pearce: To enhance our customer's ability to achieve their growth strategy faster and with less risk

Notes:

Exercise One

Instill ownership

Here's the question you need to address: **Do your employees feel like valuable contributors or little cogs in a giant wheel?** That perception is determined by your culture. If you've created an environment that invites participation rather than blocks it, you're ahead of the game.

Make sure you are giving your employees an opportunity for ownership. (I'm not referring to stock options here, although those are always great.)

Before you add layers of HR benefits, consider how employees are treated with respect to decisions, strategies and project approaches. Do they generally feel like they have a voice and a vote? Or are they told what to do and expected to do it without complaints?

Admittedly, getting input from more people takes time and effort. But remember there are several advantages. From the perspective of two-heads-are-better-than-one, you increase your odds of coming up with better ideas by casting a wider net. Plus, people like to support what they have helped to create and build.

Atkins & Pearce provides us with a great example. Their culture is founded on what they describe as a "we care" policy. They encourage every team member to communicate candidly and respectfully. It's more than just being interested in what employees have to say. Leaders deliberately seek out their opinions, and employees know that their thoughts and ideas really matter.

Notes:

Exercise Two

Start by gathering a group of leaders together to assess your company's capacity to instill ownership in its employees.

Do we lead through the power of questions?

Do we ask for (and listen to) our employees' opinions?

Do we invite them to submit their ideas?

Do we provide opportunities for those ideas and opinions to flow freely through the organization?

Do we have an unspoken bias toward ideas that come from people with the most senior titles?

What insights might we be missing if we don't listen more intentionally to front-line workers and employees at every level of the company?

If you discover that you haven't been consistent in instilling a sense of ownership within your employees, you can easily develop this new habit by following this process:

List the three biggest challenges your business is facing right now.

Distill those challenges into a concise format with key variables defined.

Ask your employees for their ideas and strategies to solve those problems.

Incorporate their feedback when developing strategies to move forward.

Express appreciation to your employees for their contributions.

Communicate frequently with them about progress and "wins."

Notes:

Exercise Three

Assemble a group of key leaders who can put the following value-added program into place. The scope of the exercise may vary depending on the size and structure of your company.

Select the top 3-5 employees on your team or within each department.

Communicate your current goals, expectations, and rationale.

Perform a gap analysis to determine if they need any additional skills or training to achieve those goals.

Eliminate any unnecessary roadblocks by giving them access to the required resources.

Coach and support them at least monthly to help them grow and monitor their progress.

Evaluate any changes in attitudes, commitment levels and performance every six months.

Expand the program over time based on your results and time constraints.

Notes:
