

A Quick Fix for America

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Getting People Excited About Coming to Work and Working Hard

Pundits, politicians and even President Obama are all saying that getting the economy back on track is going to take a long, long time. This is very depressing and it's not what the American people want to hear. They want to hear about a quick fix for the current situation—an instant turnaround that will put the economy on a fast track toward recovery today. That's the kind of news that will get the American people excited about their future.

Is there such a thing as a fast track out of this recession? The answer is YES and it's FREE. Right now many of the executives running American businesses are hunkering down, tightening their belts, laying people off and looking for additional ways to conserve. The problem is that these are the very things that prolong a recession instead of shortening it. What so many of these executives fail to realize is that the key to the fast track out of this recession is right under their noses—their employees. These are the people who do the work that the company gets paid for. The better these people do their jobs, the faster the company's revenue stream will begin to grow and that's what the fast track out of this recession is all about.

The question then becomes: how do businesses get their employees to apply their best efforts to performing their jobs? The answer is simple, but it does require a mindset change on the part of managers and executives. We learned from the Hawthorne Studies nearly a century that the better you treat employees, the harder they'll work. This being the case, you would think it would be the goal every team leader, supervisor, manager and executive to treat their employees as well as possible so they would work as hard as possible. As it turns out, in most cases the exact opposite is true.

In 2007, Zogby International conducted 7,740 online interviews of a panel that is representative of the adult population of the US. The survey found that not only were tens of millions of workers not being treated well, but 37% or an estimated 54 million American workers had personally experienced an extreme form of workplace abuse referred to as "bullying." The study defined bullying as "repeated health-harming mistreatment" that takes one or more of the following forms:

- Verbal abuse—shouting, swearing, name calling and malicious sarcasm.
- Offensive behaviors—threatening, intimidating, humiliating and inappropriately cruel conduct.
- Work interference—sabotage which prevents work from being done.

The study also found that an additional 12% of the American workforce or 17.5 million people had personally witnessed bullying behavior. This means that 49% of the workforce or

71.5 million American workers have been touched by this extreme form of workplace abuse. And, who are these bullies? Seventy-three percent of them were bosses—managers!

This is not only an outrage; it's immoral, cruel and barbaric; and it's keeping us in this recession. When employees feel abused, their motivation is to get even and find another job somewhere else. Researchers Gostick and Elton estimate the cost of employee turnover in America to be \$1.7 trillion annually. Then, if you factor in the other things employees are motivated to do when they feel they're being abused such as taking more sick days, missing work more often, stealing from the company, doing as little work as possible and a poorer quality of work, convincing other employees not to work as hard and refusing to share their ideas on how to improve products and services, we're probably looking at a four to five trillion dollar price tag for this abusive behavior. This is huge especially given that the size of the entire American economy is only \$14 trillion. Just think of the shot in the arm it would be to our economy if American business could recover a sizeable chunk of this amount.

The question then becomes: can this mess be turned around? The answer is yes, and it can be turned around immediately, but it's up to the senior managers who run American businesses. They could easily reclaim the lion's share of these four to five trillion dollars if they would do the following three things sincerely, consistently and well:

- Set an example for the managers below them. Senior managers often grossly underestimate their function as role models for managers throughout the organization. This means they need to be far more visible than they normally are and they need to be seen positively interacting with employees at *all* levels of the organization.
- Adopt a zero tolerance program for abusive behavior. Abusive behavior has no place in a modern business organization—it's immoral, it's extremely costly and we've looked the other way far too long. If an abusive boss can't be rehabilitated, he or she must be shown the door.
- Train managers at all levels on the proper way to bring out the best in the employees who work for them. We're talking about basic behaviors like being nice instead of nasty or indifferent, noticing the good things employees do and saying thank you.

These are three simple things that cost absolutely nothing. Companies that choose to implement them from the top down will immediately put themselves on the fast track to economic recovery. Those that don't will one day wonder how they got left behind.