The Key to Employee Retention

It Isn’t Simply Respect
“I don’t get any respect” is a mantra heard in offices throughout corporate America. Indeed, the common wisdom is that employees don’t leave their jobs — they leave their bosses. But the problem might not actually be getting respect from the boss. It might be bosses’ inability to inspire with a blend of energy and charisma.

In a recent study, we looked over six years of accumulated 360° survey data that rated high-potential executive for a number of core behaviors and strategies. These surveys included input from direct reports, peers, and managers, as well as the executives’ own self-assessments.
Respect Matters

One of the surprising findings to come out of this data had to do with respect. Among the 66 or so sub-items in the survey, “Treats People With Respect” came out as one of the highest-rated behaviors seen in modern executives. Direct reports, peers, and managers all agreed that, on average, high-potential executives often treated people with respect.

These results directly contradict other recent studies. For example, a 2014 Harvard Business Review article cited a study of 20,000 employees worldwide that found over half (54%) of employees claimed that they don’t regularly get respect from their leaders. That study also found that feelings of respect highly correlate with employee engagement, job satisfaction, productivity, and even overall health.

But our current study suggests that direct reports feel well respected. So if respect is not the issue, what is?

**Industries With Highest Turnover, 2014**
- Hospitality (20.2%)
- Banking & Finance (13.3%)
- Health Care (13.0%)
- Insurance (11.2%)

CompensationForce.com
Inspiring, Not Just Managing

As it turns out, the lowest-rated sub-item in our study was in the category of inspiring others: “Attracts Followers Through Personal Qualities Such as Energy and Charisma.” This suggests that, when looking to improve leadership, this might be the place to begin.

Bear in mind that the executives included in this data were all high-performers being groomed for eventual promotion. They were likely high-performers in their jobs already, and skilled in many ways. But the skill that they lacked most — and that is not being taught to them — is how to attract and inspire others.
It would make sense that employee engagement would mirror the engagement of the organization’s leadership. People tend to look toward leaders in order to gauge a situation and choose the appropriate level of enthusiasm and involvement.

Educators, for example, have known for some time that students are most engaged when the teacher is enthusiastic about the subject matter being taught. And anecdotal evidence suggests that the most excited Little League coaches have less player turnover and see the most improvement on their teams. But there’s nothing special about classrooms and baseball diamonds: Leaders in any organization and setting help set the tone for everyone else.

“Only 30% of U.S. employees are engaged at work.”

Gallup Research
The Need for Training and Practice

This suggests that personal qualities such as energy and charisma are not just “icing on the cake” — qualities that are nice to have as a leader, but unnecessary for getting the job done. They might, in fact, be important tools for setting workplace tone, achieving consensus, and spurring employee engagement.

That leads us to the most important question: Are energy and charisma simply traits that a person is born with? Or can they be taught? Like many other behaviors, there are likely both innate and learned components. The important thing to keep in mind is that these things can be improved over the course of a career. Ultimately, charisma stems from excellent communication and interpersonal skills. Energy naturally arises when there is a clear vision, meaningful work, and positive attitude. All of these qualities can be developed via training and practice.

“About one in 10 people possess the ability to manage. However, another two out of 10 possess characteristics of managerial talent and can perform if the company invests in training and development.”

*Gallup Research*
“When looking to improve leadership, the place to begin might be managers’ energy and charisma.”
Four Things You Can Start Doing Today to Improve Your Personal Qualities as a Leader

1. “Know thyself.” There are dozens of tools for exploring your own communications style and interpersonal skills. For example, you might want to start with our Dimensional® Management Matrix assessment or a 360° survey.

2. Invest in self improvement. Once you understand your personal qualities, invest in workshops and coaching opportunities that will help you reach the next level of success. Educational opportunities that focus on interpersonal skills, like our own Leadership Through People Skills® workshop, can speak specifically to skills beyond the appearance of energy and charisma.

3. Work on a vision. Spend some time thinking about where you want your organization, department, or team to be in one year. Then do the same, but five years out. How big is it? Who is a part of the action? Who do you help, and how? Then, get input from those with whom you work to create an “organic” document. Not only will this create buy-in, but it will also remove any blinders you might have. Even better, use an outside facilitator to help nurture this process — and return to it frequently.

4. Balance “getting results” with “respect for others.” Your everyday interactions with peers and direct reports speak to your energy and charisma. We call behavior that achieves a balance between getting results and showing respect Q4 behavior. And we’ve found that Q4 behavior makes for the most effective management style. While achieving a Q4 style does take work, there is a large payoff in terms of employee engagement and retention.

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