

White Paper

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Authors:

Richard A. Pierce, Ph.D.
Co-Founder & Senior
Consultant

James S. Rowell, M.S.Ed.
Co-Founder & Senior
Consultant

Do You Have “It?”

Solution Focus Areas:

Engagement / Morale
Turnover / Retention
Productivity
Leadership/Supervision

Do You Even Know What “It” Is?

*For more information, contact
Lynn Lehman at 717-512-7531,
or
Lynn@RisingSunConsultants.com*

Visit our website at
www.RisingSunConsultants.com

Do You Have “It?”

I wasn't quite sure what I was doing there. I knew that the C.E.O. felt that “things just weren't going right” within his organization, but it was difficult to pin him down on exactly what that meant. However, while sitting at lunch later that day in the XYZ Corporation cafeteria, I overheard the following conversation: (John) “No one understands me. They don't know what I am capable of doing for them.” (Mary) “If they would only take the time to listen to me once in awhile.” (Bob) “What does it matter, they don't care anyway. I just show up and put my time in.” (Sally) “I keep my mouth shut - I don't want trouble because it is not worth it anyway. They're not going to listen to me or do anything about it.” (John) “I am so upset and hurt – I just feel like quitting but I need health insurance for the family.”

What is the problem with these people? What are they so upset about?

It's always amazed me. It seems that some people get it and some don't. Growing up I assumed that everyone got it. As I got older I began to think that maybe just my friends got it and the adults were exempt from it. Then as I reached young adulthood it hit me. It's not a matter of age or where you were raised. Not even a matter of who you are. It just seems that some people get it and some don't. Over the years it has become oh so clear to me that not enough people get it.

What “IT” is...

By this time you are wondering what “it” is? “It” is the understanding of people. It's the ability to see people as people and not as things or a means to satisfy one's own needs. Many people believe that the types of people who don't understand this are big business people who are trying to get rich off the work of others. Unfortunately, however, this problem is all too common in non-profit, as well as for-profit organizations. It exists within business, education, everywhere that people are gathered together.

To many readers, this may sound crazy or just plain obvious. We wish it were so obvious. The more we try to understand organizations and people the more we realize that it is a smaller and smaller number of individuals who truly understand how to care for people, how to treat people, how to motivate people through pure and honest service to others.

More and more leaders today still do not understand that in order to be successful, in order to inspire and motivate people it takes more than being told what to do and given a paycheck. It is simply no longer acceptable to lead through negative manipulation, force, and outright deceit. The days of employees being grateful to their bosses because they were given a job and then be willing to be abused, underappreciated, and ignored are over. There is a new age of leadership emerging which focuses on caring for and serving others.

There are a lot of names for this style of leadership. But, no matter what we call it, or what we don't call it, the characteristics and traits are easily seen if we are willing to look for them. Some leaders are beginning to understand and practice the need to be more than simply a content expert in their field. True leaders need to be experts in people as well. People are not all that different when it comes right down to it. We all have a need to be loved and cared for. We all want to be understood and appreciated. We all need to have meaning in our lives that goes deeper than simply making money or doing what the boss says. We are a people that desires to seek and find long term meaning in our lives. Some call this a legacy. What ever we call it, we all have an innate desire to leave something behind. To leave behind something that people will remember us by.

Putting “It” Into Practice

Effective leaders need to not only understand this, but to put it into practice. One way this can be accomplished is through effective communication and listening skills. This can also be accomplished through conflict resolution and crisis management skills. These are not new concepts. However, there is even a more important way in which we need to lead - we need to lead with our hearts.

We know that much of the world today may say this is crazy, that we can not afford to set ourselves up for vulnerability. That we need to value strength, power, and control. These are not bad things to value if valued properly. Unfortunately, however, we often miss the boat on where true strength, control, and power come from.

True strength, power and control come through showing our vulnerabilities. They come through our weaknesses – our ability to be human. They come from other people. Our ability to be human is one of our greatest gifts. However, it is exactly this style of leadership that people are asking for. Leaders who care for people and hold high standards for behavior, performance, and attitudes are seen as inspiring and motivating. These leaders are seen taking risks and reaching out to people. They are the leaders who see something in others that most refuse to see. These leaders allow room for mistakes and risks; they provide support and resources along with positive coaching and strong feedback that builds people up.

It is time that we as leaders and followers start to expect, no demand, a new era of leadership. We need to stop acting like victims and stand up and be leaders ourselves. Businesses and organizations need to consider the long term benefits of placing a high degree of emphasis on taking care of their employees. This is not only about salary, retirement plans, and medical benefits. One way to accomplish this is to invite staff to share their thoughts and ideas and to take risks through innovative ideas. These types of behaviors can only occur when employees feel safe and cared for. This is truly the greatest gift that a leader can give to their employees.

Do you have “It?” What will your legacy be?