

THE BEST GIFT A LEADER CAN GIVE

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People's thoughts turn to giving this time of year. When thinking about buying gifts, the first question we usually ask ourselves is, "What does he (or she) want?" Then, we try to come as close as we can to giving the person what we think he or she wants.

What people want and what people need are often two different things. Some things that people want are good for them, some things are not. Also, the effects of giving people what they want don't last very long. They are happy for a short period of time. Then, they want something new, something different, and something more.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, giving people what they need is the best gift a leader can give. Giving people what they want makes people feel good. Giving people what they need makes people good. Most leaders strive to make people feel good. Great leaders strive to make people good.

To give people what they need, leaders must first know the specific needs of their people. Think about the people who work for you (or with you). Answer the following questions for each of the people who work for you (or with you) to help you better identify what they need. If you're like most leaders, you don't know how different people would answer many of these questions. If that's the case, what do you do? Let me suggest a truly radical idea – YOU ASK THEM.

1. What parts of their job does he or she enjoy the most?
2. What parts of their job does he or she enjoy the least?
3. What does he or she like most about working with you as a supervisor?
4. What does he or she like least about working with you as a supervisor?
5. How does this person like to be recognized for a job well done?

6. What is the one thing that really motivates this person to do a good job?
7. What is the one thing that this person values the most?
8. What goal does this person want to achieve in the next 1-3 years?
9. What is the one thing that is keeping this person from achieving their full potential at work?
10. What is the one thing that this person needs to know about himself or herself that they don't?

The answers to these questions lay the foundation for you to be able to give people what they need. Giving people what they need involves:

- Creating the work environment that people need
- Treating people according to their needs
- Giving people the feedback that they need

CREATING THE WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT PEOPLE NEED

The answers to questions 1-4 tell you what you need to give people relative to their job and their relationship with you, their supervisor. Ideally, you want to provide people with the opportunity to do more of what they like and do less of what they dislike in their jobs. As a supervisor, the same principle applies. You want to do more of what they like about working for you and do less of what they dislike. You can't control everything in your people's work environment. As a supervisor, however, your role is to create an environment where people want to do their best. Using the answers to questions 1-4 will help you create that environment for each of your people.

TREATING PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS

The answers to questions 5-7 tell you how people need to be treated. Recognizing people in a way that is consistent with how THEY want to be recognized is essential to treating people the way they need to be treated. Not everyone needs (or wants) to be recognized in a public setting in front of a lot of people. Also, knowing what makes people want to do a good job and what they value the most gives you valuable information about what motivates people. When you need to give that person an extra boost of energy, you can

GIVING PEOPLE THE FEEDBACK THAT THEY NEED

The answers to questions 8-10 give you some of the most important information you'll ever have about what people need from you. The gift of honesty is often difficult to give and equally difficult to receive. It is, however, the greatest gift a leader can give. Providing honest feedback to your people about their goals and expectations as well as their performance is the most important gift you'll ever give. Also, because of your role as supervisor, you are often the only person in the organization who can give such feedback. Not giving such feedback deprives the person of something important that they need to know or do to move forward.

GIVING PEOPLE WHAT THEY NEED

The benefits of giving people what they want are relatively few and short-term. On the other hand, the benefits of giving people what they need are varied and long-lasting. Giving people what they need changes their lives (and yours) for the better. During this gift-giving season, remember that giving people what they want makes people feel good. Giving people what they need makes people good. Which gift would you rather give?

About the Author

Joan Brannick, PhD, SPHR is President of Brannick HR Connections (BHRC). She is an organizational psychologist that consults, writes, and speaks on recruiting, hiring, engagement, and leadership trends and best practices. She is the co-author of Finding and Keeping Great Employees, a Fortune Magazine "Best Business Book." Her insights have appeared in many business and HR publications including Fortune Magazine, HR Magazine, and the Wall Street Journal. For more information about BHRC's services, call (813) 672-0500 or visit www.BrannickHRConnections.com.