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Optimism Brings Positive Results to the Workplace



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As a business owner or administrator, the proverbial question “Is the glass half empty or half full?” may not seem relevant to your concerns about managerial decision-making, employee retention, increased sales, and accountability. But the facts prove otherwise. Optimism, as it turns out, makes a difference in these business measures as well as productivity, customer satisfaction and profit. Why is this? Essentially, when pessimistic people run into the inevitable obstacle, they give up. After all, they never expected to succeed in the first place. But when optimistic people encounter obstacles, they try harder. Instead of giving up, they find ways to handle the obstacle and reach their objective. In addition, because optimists expect things to turn out well, they generate more positive outcomes. In today’s workplace, business acumen and professional skills are not enough to guarantee success. If you want to outperform the competition and reach optimal potential, then cultivating optimism is the answer.

The Right Kind of Optimism

But wait, you say to yourself. Aren’t those employees who always see the glass as half full just deluding themselves? To answer this question, let’s get clear about what I mean by optimism. Fostering an optimistic work environment does not mean that everyone turns into a “Pollyanna” and operates on blind faith that everything will “turn out fine.” Nor does it mean that employees operate on wishful thinking, striving for unattainable goals and focusing on fantasy desires. I am not talking about optimists who are dogmatic, ignoring any discouraging signs and only focusing on positive aspects, or about optimists who are irrational, throwing caution to the wind and overlooking the need for risk assessment.

The optimists who are needed in today’s workplace embody qualities that include self-awareness, flexibility, self-confidence, initiative, resiliency, and adaptability. Whether CEO, manager or line staff, these optimists employ a system of thinking, feeling and behaving that creates conditions for success. Their optimistic attitude allows them to recognize and redirect unproductive reactions, to think before acting, and to choose beneficial responses. Optimism equips them with a perspective that fosters personal accountability, innovative thinking and appropriate risk-taking.



Optimism Makes You Smarter

An added plus in the workplace is the fact that optimism makes you smarter. Researchers have shown that positive emotions actually fuel creativity and enhance your reasoning skills, creating more successful results. This is because a positive mood changes the way your brain processes information. If you're under stress, feel beaten down, or are in a sad mood, your brain hunkers down. You become more detached and cautious because your brain focuses on what's wrong and how to eliminate it. On the other hand, when you are in a relaxed, cheerful mood, your brain opens up. More neurons fire and your brain is likely to enter into a creative, exploratory state. You begin to seek out new experiences in your environment. You feel expansive, generous, tolerant and productive.

Optimism Can Be Learned

And here's even more good news. Optimism can be learned. Natural optimists can cultivate more optimism and born pessimists can become 50% more optimistic by learning how to choose thoughts, feelings and behaviors that put them on an upward spiral. How can you or people you manage become more optimistic? Employees can acquire the tools for creating success in the workplace by learning to ask five important questions that allow them to adapt to change and respond to the new demands of today's competitive marketplace. These are:

1. What can I do to achieve the best possible outcome?
2. What are innovative responses to the situation?
3. What do I need to know to reach a productive conclusion?
4. What can I learn from this situation that will help me in the future?
5. What is an interpretation of this event that will motivate me to continue to strive for excellence and success?

By employing strategies that allow you to put these questions into practice, you become more adept in handling any situation that might arise. When things don't go your way, don't waste time and energy thinking, "This always happens to me. I can never get a break." This kind of thinking leads to inaction, helplessness, avoidance and conflict in the workplace. Instead, respond to a difficult situation by focusing your energy on areas of the situation that can be controlled. Figure out ways to solve problems creatively and appraise events objectively in order to find beneficial actions. When there is a setback or mistake, look for insights that will help you improve. And approach difficulties by looking for potential gains.

Optimism Pays Off

Managers who are optimistic raise the aspirations of people to achieve their individual best by focusing on innovation, problem-solving and creative failures. Customer-service representatives who are optimistic are more likely to connect with the customer and ensure a positive outcome to the interaction. Line staff who are optimistic will be able to find the positive when the inevitable changes occur in policies and procedures. Salespeople who are optimistic will make more sales. Charles Schultz said, "Life is like a ten speed bike. Most of us have gears we never use." By teaching and fostering optimism in the workplace, you help your employees tap into and use their full potential as you unleash your own capacity for success.

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