

Management Ideas



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RESULTS

RELATIONS

REPUTATION

a monthly newsletter to key executive-leaders
on practices, possibilities and ideas generally
for stepped up performance

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3410 ROYAL BANK AWARD: Men and women of great achievements and accomplishments are being recognized in our country, without doubt: but there is a lot more scope.

Those who are planning to institute an Award may draw inspiration from this one.

To ensure that remarkable achievements are acknowledged, the Bank established this Award in 1967, Canada's Centennial Year. The Award consists of \$100,000 and a gold medal.

The annual Royal Bank Award for Canadian Achievement honours a Canadian Citizen whose outstanding accomplishment makes an important contribution to human welfare and the common good.

The scope of activity for which the Award is made covers a broad range:

- *the natural and social sciences
- *the arts and humanities
- *the business and industrial communities.

The Awardee list includes: Dr. Wilder Penfield (neurosurgeon - 1967), Mary Pack (Organizer of the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society - 1976) Rt. Rev. George Henri Levesque (Scholar and Educator - 1982), Dr. David T. Suzuki (geneticist, science educator and broadcaster - 1986), Dr. Robert Ferguson Legget (Engineer - 1989) and Bill Reid (Sculptor and craftsman - 1990).

3411 A LETTER FROM AN EMPLOYEE: The employee population can be divided into two broad categories - the majority and the minority. Companies get so preoccupied with the minority that they almost ignore the majority and in the bargain become losers. We need to see things in proper perspective. How this majority feels is well brought out in the accompanying item that appeared in one of the business publications ("Business to Business.")

Dear Mr. Employer:

I'm curious. I see you buying state-of-the-art equipment, leasing more attractive space, developing fancy brochures, doing anything and everything to set us apart from our competition. But what about me, your employee? It's also important to include me on your list of investments, because I'm one of your more costly assets to replace. And I'm saddened to have to make it. To give you an idea of what I'm talking about, I've jotted down some ways you can invest in me. I'm talking about a personal, not a monetary, investment, which includes: treating me as a person, not a machine; helping me grow; trusting me; and taking a personal interest in me.

First, I'm a person, not a machine. I have feelings, thoughts, concerns, interests, problems, answers, etc. So, I wish to be treated as a person. Show me that you know I exist. Let me know I'm not just part of the balance sheet like a fixed asset necessary to run our business. Take some time to really understand what I do for you and what you can do to help me do my job. I want to do well for you and our business. But in order to do that, I need feedback from you. Tell me that you appreciate my work and be specific. In being specific, you'll let me know what behaviour to continue or what to stop to help our business to grow. Give me that pat on the back! But if you have to make something up to compliment me, don't tell me at all. This is not a quantitative investment, but a qualitative one.

Another aspect to treating me as a person is to ask for my input. This is especially important if a business decision will greatly affect me.

I understand that the decision will not necessarily change, or that I alone will make the decision. Asking me for my input lets me know you respect my skills and knowledge regarding the job I do for you. And on those occasions when I can make the decision, coach me to make a sound business decision.

Second, help me grow. This investment recognizes that since I'm not perfect, I make mistakes. I don't have all the answers about my job, but I have some good ideas. If I have done or said something that you're concerned about, please tell me. Again, be specific. Don't just tell me I've done a lousy job. I want to know what specifically is lousy about the job. All of it or just parts? I don't always know that I've made a mistake, and unless you tell me, I may never know. Or worse yet, you tell me on my annual performance review, when it's too late for me to help either myself or the corporate bottom line.

Third, trust me! I want this more than anything. I'm a good person and I work for you, most likely, because our values match. I'm not stealing from you and don't wish to be treated as if I am doing so.

You won't find office supplies at my house, or books that I have "borrowed" and never returned. Also, as I grew up, one important lesson my parents taught me as "what goes on in this house stays in this house." I have learned to transfer that lesson to business and wish for you to trust that I won't share important business information inappropriately. And last, trust that I do know how to do my job and give me the accountability and responsibility I want that goes along with it.

Fourth, take a personal interest in me. There is not a me that is totally focused on work, and another totally focused on home. I wish there were two of me at times! But there aren't. There is one person with two focuses. In as much as my family shares in my work life, I appreciate a boss, an organization, that is interested in my family.

As I look over all these points, what I'm trying to say is, I want you to value me as much as you value all the wonderful gizmos. I'm a more important asset for the success of our business than the new computer system or the paintings hanging on the walls. All these esthetics are nice but without me how important are they? What good are they?

If you invest in me with a little bit of your time, your concern and interest in me as a person, and your trust that I will do good by you, I promise you a higher ROI with me as an employee. If not, I have no right to question your choice of investments for the success of our business.

Sincerely,

Your loyal employee

3412 DOING BUSINESS IN JAPAN: When we do business with another country, every little counts. Moreover, we do not want to learn the hard way. Here is an informative piece from a specialist (Walter Bruderer in Financial Times):

If your company is planning to do business in Japan for the first time, prepare for a shock. Modern, high-tech and sophisticated it may seem; but in many respects it remains an old-fashioned country, clinging to ancient business practices and bound by traditions that mystify outsiders.

After 10 years of living in Japan, I have found 10 keys to getting off to a good start:

‡ **Establishing a good relationship.** The Japanese tend to be rather formal in the rituals of beginning a relationship with a foreigner. It is a slow process - the introduction, exchange of business cards, the gradual beginning of business talks, drawn-out decision making.

The Japanese believes this is a judicious way to launch a long-lasting business relationship. Most Japanese expect to remain with one employer for life. If they choose to do business with you, they expect the friendship to generate loyalty on both sides and endure into the future.

Such a valuable business relationship requires careful cultivation - sales calls, courtesy visits, perhaps an occasional lunch or other social event.

‡ **Describing your organization.** Besides wanting to get to know you, the Japanese believe getting to know your organization in some detail is time well spent.

On your first visit your host will welcome pamphlets, brochures, anything that describes your organization, where it operates, what it sells and what you hope to accomplish in Japan. These may have been published originally in English or another language, but it would be courteous to have the main points printed on separate piece of paper in Japanese and inserted in each document.

‡ **Meetings.** For a first meeting, try to get a mutual acquaintance to introduce you by letter or telephone. The Japanese are accustomed to this. Request a time for your appointment and, once made, don't change it. This demonstrates that you respect the other person's time and that you are reliable and well organized. Do not make so many appointments for the day that you have to rush. Tokyo and Osaka are enormous cities, so make allowances for traffic delays that could disrupt a schedule.

Bring a small gift for your Japanese counterpart. A good choice is a modest novelty item made in your country. A bad choice is an item from your firm, which is viewed as paltry giveaway and not as a gift.

‡ **Knowing how decisions are made.** Decisions in Japan are usually made by middle management, not by the president or chief executive officer.

When you first call on a firm, you may meet the president, but only to exchange greetings. With that formality out of the way, you will make your proposal at a lower level, probably to the head of a department or division.

‡ **Waiting for a "yes" or "no".** If you are accustomed to a prompt "yes" or "no" after making your sales pitch to a prospect, the deliberate decision-making of the Japanese may shock your sensibilities and shake your ego.

No matter how attractive your product, how thorough and convincing your presentation, how flexible and accomodating your position, do not expect to come away from your first meeting with a "yes" or "no". The Japanese will assure you that they will consider the matter and see what action can be taken.

It is partly a matter of courtesy - not offending you as a foreigner with a hasty "no". It is also a matter of the Japanese wanting time to evaluate your proposal, your organization and you personally. They anticipate a long, loyal relationship and this rules out precipitate action.

This is the way of doing things in Japan. And, once the decision is made, it will usually be final and carried out expeditiously because the middle manager has consulted everyone, effectively cutting off further dissent.

Being patient, patient, patient. Traditions, customs, rituals are evident everywhere in the Japanese way of conducting business. They have a tendency to slow things down. But they add a certain charm and tend to venerate long-lasting, loyal relationships.

The best virtue you can display in the face of traditions is patience. It may be the key to your success in Japan.

Using the Japanese language. You would be wise to use Japanese in sales materials and every kind of promotional effort.

Using the language helps give you the look of belonging and you increase your chances of reaching and persuading the Japanese by using their language.

To make sure no misleading or offensive nuances find their way into your copy, hire a native-born writer to translate your copy into Japanese.

If you cannot escape using English instead of Japanese, be warned this will do some measure of damage to your image as a newcomer to Japan.

Speaking English. For all practical purposes the Japanese are not fluent in English. But they are not total strangers to the language and many have limited vocabulary.

If you have to use English, speak slowly; use simple words and sentences; be direct and uncomplicated; write down key words and numbers and display them in a meeting. If you can at least learn some common Japanese expressions, the Japanese will admire your effort to fit in. Even a meagre vocabulary will help you catch the meaning and flavour of what is being said.

Adopting a moderate approach. The Japanese prefer your sales efforts to be in keeping with their customary pace - moderate, low-key, deliberate.

In this unhurried, atmosphere, the Japanese view the hard-driving, argumentative, slam-bang type of presentation as self-centred, ostentatious and confrontational. It is the wrong way to nurture a relationship.

Dressing. In Japanese offices, individuals rarely wear clothing that makes them stand out. They favour plain, conservative dress. So should you. You are better off blending in quietly than loudly standing out.

3413 PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS: The idea behind performance reviews is not just to document and justify decisions about raises, promotions or transfers. You also want to help employees improve the way they do their jobs.

But it doesn't always turn out that way. Often as not, employees leave these sessions confused about their boss's expectations or, worse, resentful of criticisms they believe are unfair.

HR Magazine suggests seven steps to design a better appraisal system:

- **Get a consensus.** Supervisors and employees alike can play a role in designing performance reviews. Bring them together into a manageable group to outline criteria and objectives.
- **Consider a two-tiered review process.** The goals of guiding employees to better performance and reviewing salary decisions are sometimes at odds. It may be best to have separate interviews with employees to address the two aims.
- **Stick with what you can observe.** Employees need feedback on their job performance and the results they achieve.
- **Leave personal stuff out of it.** Many appraisal systems ask supervisors to rate an employee's strengths and weaknesses in areas such as maturity and attitude. These evaluations are subjective and can lead to conflicts - even lawsuits.
- **Listen, then talk.** The experience is more comfortable for both parties if you let the employee start with self-evaluation.
- **Praise, then criticize.** It's also more constructive if you start by noting the employee's strengths. Often as not, employees know their weaknesses. Follow their lead in discussing them.
- **Conclude with a plan.** The way to help employees improve is to find out what's holding them back. Then address the problem with specific solutions.

3414 WHY NOT BONUS IN KIND: *If for reasons of law or agreement a bonus has to be paid and if the company does not have cash but plenty of inventory, why not give the product in lieu of cash? This is not theory. This is done in Japan as the accompanying item confirms:*

In Japan, bonuses are paid twice a year and make up a big part of employee's pay. This year, Japanese workers will receive an average winter bonus of \$3,800, equivalent to 2.3 months' pay, economists say.

The value of NEC's certificates ranges from \$800 to \$2,400, depending on the rank of the 6,500 employees - from managers up - who are eligible to receive the substitutes as part of their winter bonus, NEC said.

The certificates are exchangeable for NEC products like personal computers, televisions, video recorders and cordless telephones.

The Mitsubishi Electric Corporation took similar measures for paying summer bonuses this year, providing coupons to employees who ranked as director and higher.

3415 RECOMMENDED READING/BOOK NOTES:

DO IT!: by John Roger and Peter McWilliams (Prelude Press, Los Angeles) \$11.95

The subtitle reads: **Let's Get Off Our Butts.** The additional sub title says: **A Guide to Living Your Dreams.** This book on the art of living is a synthesis of possible wisdom. In short chapters of two pages or less, the authors deliciously describe concepts and define practices. No wonder it has been on the **New York Times** Best seller list.

REFRAMING ORGANIZATIONS by Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal (Jossey Bass Publishers, San Francisco) \$21.95.

This book commends a balanced and therefore healthy approach to management and leadership. Such an approach takes four frames into account - the **structural frame**: helps managers establish and maintain the formal roles and relationships that enable organizations to get things done; the **human resource frame**: focuses on improving the organization's ability to motivate it's people and get maximum benefit from their ideas, energy and skills; the **political frame** offers insight into how to manage the inevitable competition for power and scarce resources; and the **symbolic frame** guides managers in addressing the need for meaning at work.

Using numerous examples from business, education, health care, and the public sector, the authors demonstrate how to integrate these four frames into a powerful, coherent, and flexible management strategy that can be applied in any organization. They show how reframing can help managers become constructive change agents.

KAIZEN TEIAN 2 edited by Japan Human Relations Association (Productivity Press, Cambridge, USA) \$39.95

Kaizen in Japanese means continuous improvement of the standard way of work. This kind of creative improvement is something that every employee is capable of participating in - in fact, since a front-line employee is most familiar with the actual work, there is no better person to ask for improvement ideas. **Teian** means proposal. **Kaizen Teian** is a companywide system for implementing continuous improvement proposals from employees, one of the most effective and widespread forms of kaizen activities in Japan. This book offers concrete help for managers and supervisors to implement such a system.

All the three books are easy on the eye as well.

3416 LAUGHING MATTER? The eight-year-old gave his dad an angelic look: "You wouldn't punish me for something I didn't do, would you, Dad?"

"Of course not," his father answered.

"Good," the boy replied happily, "I knew I didn't have to worry so much about my homework!"

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