

EMPLOYEES NEED TO KNOW WHERE THEY FIT IN

by Pamela A. Scott

A key communication gap in most professional services firms involves what is called “line of sight.” That phrase refers to how well an employee understands the entire business process and her connection to that process. This gap becomes evident when cuts have to be made.

Bill, CEO of a professional services firm with 120 employees, expressed his dismay about staff’s understanding of how the business works. Now that things are busy again, some professional staff are questioning why they have to put in so many hours, but the business development staff get to go play golf or go to ball games.

“As always, my staff engineers are questioning what they perceive as inequities. Their target is the business development folks. ‘You’re asking us to work long hours, but Don and Janet still play golf, go to ballgames, and more. They’re never in the office. Why are they so special?’

“I don’t know what to do to help the engineers understand why the business development (BD) staff do what they do,” Bill said.

Overcoming Tunnel Vision

Bill’s dilemma is common to all businesses, regardless of size. The troops have tunnel vision. Each employee only knows his or her small piece of the business. They don’t understand that doing business is a long process, and they are each one little point in the process.

Let’s use the alphabet as a simple example. As everyone knows, there are 26 letters that go from A to Z. Say your name begins with S. Then for you, S is the focus of your alphabet. As S, you don’t focus on the other 25 letters. If your name begins with C, C is your focus. As C, you don’t pay much attention to the other 25 letters.

Translating The Alphabet Into Business Processes

Staff in any business, particularly professional service firms, only understand their individual role in the business cycle. BD folks don’t focus on the fact that project managers need to deliver on the promises the BD people make. The project managers don’t focus on the BD folks’ need to get repeat business with their clients, even if that means taking clients to ball games or playing golf.

What’s A Boss To Do?

Company leaders have to educate all employees on the entire business process, from the cold calls to get business, to getting the work done on time, to getting paid on time, to doing repeat work for each client. It doesn’t have to be in great detail; just give them an overview.

One firm put together a timeline of the entire process and added names to key points in the process to give staff a better understanding of who the players are and where they function in the process. Managers can use the timeline to educate employees during a Lunch and Learn.

The timeline should also go on the company’s intranet and other internal marketing avenues.

Towers Watson, an international consulting firm, discovered that when employees have line of sight—an understanding of how their job fits in with the company’s strategic direction—financial returns are four times higher than otherwise. That ought to cover the cost of a few pizzas. ●



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contract personnel on to flex to higher workloads without incurring the pains of full employment costs and workforce reductions.

But, as you would expect, the convenience of dialing ten digits and putting them to work on an opening is an expensive answer. 40-75% markups to the hourly rates or 15-35% of the first year’s annual salary are generally the price tags that go along with this solution. Many work, many are very effective, and the flexible workforce is helpful when you need staff for a short period. I just caution my hiring managers to use networking and our internal recruitment team first and if we strike out that way, move to the staffing firm. Staffing agency costs pass through right to our bottom lines.

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85.9%...

the amount of the developed world that is expected to be urbanized by 2050, according to a report by Inhabit.com.