

## views you can use



### **Leadership, Motivation & Productivity**

By Linda Tennant

# Counterbalance Apathy to Increase Productivity

**A**re you or your people apathetic? We might be a bit insulted by the question, yet, like the law of gravity, apathy is a natural part of life. We define apathy as *"a natural human instinct, common to us all, that consistently encourages us to seek a comfort zone in which nothing ever changes."* Perhaps the question we should ask is how, not if, apathy is affecting us.

#### **SYMPTOMS & DANGERS OF APATHY**

Have you experienced or seen these symptoms of apathy? Take a minute to check off any that apply right now: burn-out, stagnation or low morale, indecision, lack of creativity, lack of motivation, lack of productivity, resistance to change, or lack of urgency.

These symptoms cause many problems within an organization and negatively affect the bottom line and company culture. Like gravity, apathy cannot be eliminated – it is a natural tendency. It is natural to seek a comfort zone. Without proactive leadership, an organization will be weighed down with many issues that are a result of apathy. Counterbalancing apathy is perhaps the single most important thing leaders can do with their people and themselves.

Don't take it for granted that these

symptoms are normal - even that thought reflects apathy! Realize there is a common cause for the symptoms; this will save you from wasting time addressing symptoms rather than the root cause.

#### **STEPS TO COUNTERACT APATHY**

**1. Establish and Communicate Clear Vision and Purpose:** This is not just a "fluff" exercise. Have you seen how strong our motivation is when we have a clear purpose or reason to work out consistently, such as wanting to look good for a class reunion or fit into a piece of clothing? Without vision or purpose, working out just becomes a chore that we avoid.

**2. Include Your People** in setting specific goals toward the vision and help them know the benefits to them personally in achieving the goals.

**3. Know What Motivates Each Employee:** It's not just money, and it's likely not the same thing that motivates you.

**4. Develop Yourself and Your People:** People, like organizations, are either growing or declining. People who are growing are stimulated, more creative and better able to take on new things and make better decisions. When you

and your people expand, the organization expands.

Developing people shouldn't be done haphazardly. Create a cohesive development plan for each person that fully involves the organization's vision and takes into account each person's specific growth needs. Be sure to note upfront how the effectiveness of the development will be measured.

**5. Challenge Your People:** Do you think it's possible to balance eleven nails at once on the head of one nail sticking out of a board without using outside supports? It sounds impossible, doesn't it? In fact, it is possible and we teach people to do this in a matter of minutes to show what can be done with a little information and teamwork. Challenge your people to do the impossible.

Like gravity, our resistance to apathy is something ongoing, and something a leader should not ignore. Becoming aware of apathy and taking prudent action will always pay big dividends. Your people and customers will thank you for it! ■

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