Aligning Passion with Purpose
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Insurance, regulations, fairness and bed bugs OH MY!! The 29th Annual Rocky Mountain AHMA conference promises to be packed with ideas you can take home and use, but what are the highest leverage skills you can attain for bringing you and your team to the highest levels in 2011 and beyond? Peter Senge called these high leverage skills “Master Skills” because their attainment multiplies the Affect* of all others.

As predicted, supply and demand seem headed in opposite directions with AHMA members caught squarely in the middle; and despite all the grassroots advocacy there is still a great deal beyond your daily control. It is in these times of greatest need that we must bring out the best in each of our stakeholders. Suppliers, residents, employees, families and leaders all need a consistent and congruent focus to pull us through the storms to come. Unfortunately we often seem pulled in so many directions it is difficult to pull together when you feel like you are being pulled apart.

The good news is that your greatest stressors and those for all your team members are entirely within your control. Stress is not a result of our situations, but our conversations. We have always had a housing shortage and it has always been the most vulnerable among us who have suffered the greatest. But when times were the most difficult we had each other. In prehistoric times, tribes gathered together around cave paintings celebrating successful hunts and family milestones with abundant appreciation.
Today’s “Tribal Texting” has been raised to an art form with messages gleaned from around the globe; animated, highlighted complete with “professional” commentary and pumped directly into our homes 24 hours per day all for a single reason - to generate fear. We live in a culture fascinated by fear and this fear takes a devastating toll on every member of your team in both turnover and disengagement.

Studies published by J.D. Phillips in The Price Tag on Turnover estimated the average cost of employee turnover to be one and a half times that individual’s annual salary. The truth is job dissatisfaction is no longer the exception, it is the norm. Less than 45% of employees report being satisfied in their jobs, and “interest in work” has dropped almost 19% since 1987. Many employers still believe providing a paycheck should be enough especially with actual unemployment figures hovering around 18%. But with employee disengagement costing American Industry $350 Billion per year (The Gallup Organization) it is tangibly apparent that income is not enough. Employees are universally fed up with work that leaves them overstressed and underappreciated.

The good news for AHMA members is this has very little to do with the workload, regulatory environment or economy and everything to do with our attention. Successful leaders realize the most limited resources are not time, money or people, but attention span.

We are all overwhelmed with being overwhelmed, and the more stressed we are the more primitive (fear focused) our attention span becomes. Edward Hallowell identified this diminished capacity as “Attention Deficit Trait”, characterized by attenuated attention, creativity and energy as our limbic systems respond in high alert. The resulting cascade of reaction saps both desire and ability resulting in a workforce that is disengaged (55%) or even worse (17%) actually working against the system.

Fortunately our primitive response systems are equally powerful in reverse. It may be valuable to realize that for being a highly evolved species we are not very evolved at all. Logic and reasoning are vastly overmatched when competing for the center stage of our attention.
We are not thinking beings who have feelings, we are feeling beings who have thoughts, and every one of those thoughts are bathed in the emotions that surround every cell in our bodies. This is something we all KNOW without question and yet many leave it to chance, Karma or accidental chemistry to create “esprit de corps” in our workplace. We comfort ourselves in the illusion that satisfied patients are the path to practice success, when the most accurate metric is actually the ratio of employee satisfaction to patient satisfaction. The more satisfied employees are the more they radiate that energy to everyone they touch.

We are all simply energy, and that energy resonates in the frequency of our emotions. Don Miguel Ruiz in his wonderful book The Four Agreements puts it very simply: “We are who we are at our best when we are children, after that we become domesticated”. Has your team become too domesticated? Has your team forgotten that life (including work) is supposed to be fun? We cannot change all the forces or turmoil around us. Once you understand the current regulations they will surely change; your amazing adeptness of acronyms may only help your Jumble score, but understanding how to manage your emotions and those of others will change EVERYTHING in your life.

The ideas included here contain thirty simple steps for creating (or sustaining) an extraordinary team. The ideas are broken down into three ten step processes:

I. Improving Job Satisfaction: an Employee perspective
II. Employers: Ten Actionable Ideas for improving Employee satisfaction
III. Ideas in Action: Ten steps for transforming your organization through Employee-conducted training.

The ideas in this series are presented without my trademark humor, but rather as a succinct resource for specific action steps. They are also not the easy Band Aid solutions which mask the underlying causation, but an opportunity to explore the core belief systems that shape our perception.

Improving Job Satisfaction: an Employee perspective

If you are looking for advice on poisoning or dismembering your boss, this will not be the place to find it. I have also chosen not to include tips on negotiation, boundary management, job hunting or dealing with difficult people. The only difficult person I will address in these ten steps is you. Believe it or not this is the best news you have heard all day because the only person you will ever be able to change is yourself.
If the ideas make little or no sense or they make you angry, join the club. I have been studying these ideas for thirty years and continue to feel all of the above at times. If you would like to know more about the sources of these ideas or debate their value they will be posted on my blog, or contact me directly at randy@redshoesolutions.com.

1. **LIFE IS A LESSON**: It does not matter whether you believe there is a higher power or you are in this on your own, believing there is a lesson in all we experience is a powerful tool to opening your mind to new opportunities. Use this as a time not to take new action, but to create new understanding.

2. **ACCEPT 100% ACCOUNTABILITY**: Accountability is different than responsibility. Accountability has no history, no baggage. It does not matter how you got here, who your boss or coworkers are. You are the creator of your experience.

3. **BE SELF EMPLOYED**: Regardless of who you work for approach every day as if this is your own business. Whether your employer appreciates all the extra things you do is of little consequence. The important thing is who you become. Everything else can be taken away, but who you become in the process is by far your greatest job benefit.

4. **FORGIVE EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING ESPECIALLY YOURSELF**: Resentment, remorse, blame, guilt, shame are on the very bottom of negative energy scale. Using these emotions to “motivate” change is like pouring gasoline on a house to heat it.

5. **CHANGE YOUR LANGUAGE**: We just have to listen in to any breakroom conversation to hear stories of how stressed, frustrated, bored, distracted, or 100 other _______ed’s people might be. Each loaded with negative energy and each blaming someone or something for their situation. The next time you are tempted to end your favorite adjective with a passive “ed” try an active “ing” for a more accurate description.

6. **BECOME AN OBSERVER**: Learn to observe your own inner dialogue. No one speaks to us more than we do, and yet most of the conversation goes on unconsciously and unchallenged.

7. **TALK NICE**: Studies have shown that more than 77% of our own self talk is critical in nature. We say things to ourselves we would never allow others to say, and then direct this dialogue to others as well. Every thought, every word has a resonance, and that energy that either builds us up or tears us down.
8. **GIVE UP ATTACK:** We never really attack others, but only the projection of ourselves within them. Consider this next time you are playing that mental game of mash the muggle. Is there a part of you that you see in this person? Also realize that when you get angry or depressed your hypothalamus releases peptides that stress every cell in your body. When you attack others you are literally attacking yourself.

9. **VISUALIZE WHAT YOU WANT:** See what you want in present tense in all the visceral detail possible. We are very good at picturing and feeling negative experiences, but each time we do so we draw them closer to us. Notice how many times you picture or “Fascinate” about a negative outcome. Then gradually catch yourself in the act, and replace the picture with what you do want.

10. **BECOME A VORACIOUS STUDENT OF YOU:** The average college graduate does not read one non-fiction book after graduation. We spend countless hours learning skills for everything from accounting to social networking, and yet little if any learning to understand how we think. Remember, “We feel the way we feel because we think the way we think”.

**I. Employers:** **Ten Actionable Ideas for improving employee satisfaction.** These ideas apply to everyone. Regardless of role or position we all benefit from a process of inspired collaboration.

1. **LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN:** “Our greatest obstacle to growth is not what we don’t know, but what we think we do know.” Use these Employee Satisfaction results as an opportunity to make sure your employees are enthusiastic, engaged and empowered. Use anonymous employee surveys and ask that all-important question “what do we do stupid around here”? Copy this link into your browser [http://redshoesolutions.blogspot.com/2009/10/would-you-be-outraged-you-are.html](http://redshoesolutions.blogspot.com/2009/10/would-you-be-outraged-you-are.html) to see how one manager creates an environment where 82% of employees rate their workplace either a 4 or 5 as a fun place to work, (5 being “it is so much fun I would pay THEM to work here!”).  

2. **ACT:** If you get feedback, whether positive or negative, appreciate it and act on it. Feedback from either customers or employees is a gift, treat it as such. Only one out of ten customers will tell you if they are unhappy; the rest will vote with their feet.
Disengaged employees cost the American economy $350 billion per year in lost productivity. (The Gallup Organization)

3. **BE 100% ACCOUNTABLE:** It does not matter how you got this way, who your employees are or what the rest of the world is doing. Accept the fact that you create your experience.

4. **APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY:** Deepak Chopra has a wonderful phrase we hold on to when times are the most challenging, *“The best thing that can happen, is happening.”* To tell yourself anything less is to tell yourself you are not enough and you don’t have what it takes. You are more powerful than you can even imagine, all you have to do is imagine it.

5. **FORGIVE EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING ESPECIALLY YOURSELF:** We all do the best we can at the time. There is no value in blaming, criticizing or judging anyone. ANYTIME you blame anyone you are physically attacking your own body.

6. **TREAT EVERYONE AS A VOLUNTEER** - because they are. People will do what is expected because they are required, but they will do the exceptional when they are inspired. Always remember “The deepest craving in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.” William James

7. **GIVE UNREASONABLE FREEDOM:** We all have rules imposed upon us that we can do nothing about we also have self imposed rules that inhibit performance, stifle productivity and produce unnecessary stress. The European Heart Journal, January 23, 2008 published an article revealing that “Workload or responsibility had little relation to stress levels. Rather it was how much control an employee had over the work he did and how he did it.”

8. **DON’T TAKE FEEDBACK (ANYTHING) PERSONALLY.** In Step 4 I said you have all the power which is absolutely true, but the only person you have that power over is you. In the same way you determine how you feel; your employees do the same. Great leaders help people understand the power of our personal stories. Stress is not a characteristic of our times, but of our stories.
9. SHARE THE SCORE: Examine your systems for measuring, sharing, engaging and rewarding employees for continually improving the process. 75-85% of the reason we achieve great results is through creating desirable consequences.

10. BE A GREAT TEACHER: The ultimate goal of every profession is to make the world a better place. As a leader you have the opportunity to help your employees learn the most important lessons of all - lessons about themselves. When asked what people want most from their career they express a wide range of desires from challenge to authority, meaning, money, growth, and opportunity; but when asked why they want each of those things the answer comes down to one - they want to be happy. Great teachers, through experience and example, teach everyone they touch that happiness is always an inside job.

II. Ideas in Action: Ten steps for transforming your organization through Employee-conducted training. Each of these Action Steps provided could easily be a chapter in your “Play Book”. If they are things you are already doing take this time to celebrate WITH YOUR TEAM. We all want to feel we are part of something special but in the midst of the “battle” we forget all we have to be grateful for. If any of these ideas “strike your fancy” and you would like to do more here are ten steps for one very Affective* plan for implementation.

1. MAKE EVERYONE A TEACHER: The best way to learn anything is to teach it. Ask members to select the topics that resonate most with them and have them prepare and train the team on that topic. MAKE SURE THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL. One of the key lessons the founder of Sylvan Learning Centers Berry Fowler taught me was, “We don’t teach people to make them successful, we make them successful to teach them”.

2. MAKE LEARNING A PRIORITY: Growing people should not be something you do if you have the time. Make the time and make it important. If your people don’t grow, neither will your organization.

3. CLEARLY DEFINE EXPECTATIONS: If people don’t know exactly what to expect they will instinctively fall into the fear mode. Define the time their presentation should take, whether handouts are required, and what kind of progress you want to see and when.
4. DEFINE PROGRESS: Schedule check-in and status dates to review progress.

5. TEAMS: Use presentation teams to breakdown departmental or personal barriers.

6. ADDRESS CHALLENGES: Assign “opportunity people” with the topic that most fits their personal growth needs.

7. SUPPORT RESEARCH: Provide resources like books, tapes, articles (or have them write me for assistance). The greatest value of this exercise is not in the presentation, but the preparation.

8. DRESS REHEARSAL: Meet with team presenters in advance to review both presentation and materials. You can also assign team members to perform this function therefore giving all members the opportunity to both present and coach. Include presentation skills. Speaking in front of a group is a frightening experience for many. Use this as an opportunity to enhance those skills as well.

9. REVIEW PROGRESS: Begin each new training session with a review, quiz or sharing session of how the previous lesson had been put into practice. Remember that it is easy to begin things. It is difficult to keep the conversation going.

10. REWARD EFFORT: Appreciate super success, fabulous failures and everything in between. “Where we stumble, there lies our treasure.” Joseph Campbell (modified slightly by RM)

What’s with the Red Chuck Taylors?
My Red High Tops are intended first to break down fear, which is the greatest obstacle to any kind of learning. Second they are a mnemonic device to facilitate retention and generate conversation. The shoes represent five key points propelling the ideas shared into action.

1. GET IN THE GAME: It is easy to sit on the sidelines and have “permanent potential” or to be perpetually critical. The clock is ticking; play while you have the chance.
2. ADAPT TO CHANGING DIRECTIONS: The shoes are high tops to provide support unlike running shoes for following a continuous path. We must consistently find new ways of doing things, change directions and pick ourselves up at least one more time than we fall down.

3. KEEP IT SIMPLE: I selected Converse All Stars (long before they were popular..again) because they are virtually the same as they were when they were made more than 80 years ago. Reticence to change is often bound in the belief that our challenges are different, special, complicated. Chuck Taylors remind us that each step is a binary decision. You do or you don’t, yes or know.

4. DON’T CONFORM: Earl Nightingale said; “The opposite of courage is not cowardice, it is conformity”. My shoes are bright red to signify the passion of being yourself. Greatness is never achieved by overcoming our weaknesses, but enhancing our strengths in service to others.

5. HAVE FUN: Lastly the shoes are a reminder to have fun in the process. We are better at everything we do when we enjoy the process. We are better parents, spouses, employees, people when we take our jobs seriously and ourselves lightly.

The Rubik’s cube is a symbol to remind us of our endless diversity. None of us see hear or want the exactly the same things. Like the 43 Quintillion potential variations of the Rubik’s cube we are each shaped by our experiences.