

■ The People Principles

10 Ways to Build a People-Centered Workplace

by Tom Terez

Let's admit it already: Every workplace is fundamentally about people. Sure, we need information systems and technology and supply chains and metrics. Improvement in these areas is a good thing. But these are the inanimate aspects of work. The real heart and mind of every organization are found in its people.

End of story? Not by a long shot. If you truly want to bring out the best in people, you need to take action, whatever your role in the organization. Ten down-to-earth ideas are listed below. None of these are akin to installing new computers or developing a set of key indicators. They're much more difficult than that – and they hold more potential.

1. Think *how*, not what

Assignments and deadlines keep us focused on the work itself – sometimes so much that we lose sight of the people who do the work. Maintain a wider perspective. Instead of asking people *what* they're doing, ask them *how* they're doing.

2. Don't say, ask

You *think* you know the right approach or the right answer, and maybe you do. But if you want to engage and empower people, skip the statements and start asking questions. Go from “here's what I think” to “what do *you* think?”

3. Work it out now

When conflicts arise, letting them simmer is easier in the short term – but destructive in the long term. Unless you're fond of grudges and hurt feelings, start resolving today's conflicts today.

4. Just say thanks

There's no need for fancy awards and rewards – because there's no substitute for simple, sincere appreciation. Make a habit of putting your gratitude into words.

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of every organization
are found in its people.**

5. Take action inclusively

A bias for action is a good thing. But the action should be done *with* people and not to them or despite them. If you're going to implement anything that affects anyone, gather a group of co-creators.

6. Turn up the differences

A workplace full of do-as-you're-told clones would be so easy to manage. And so boring. And so pa-

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thetically unsuccessful. Look for and leverage those precious differences in yourself and your colleagues. As long as you have meaningful goals in common, you'll achieve uncommon success.

7. Tell stories

If you want to shape the workplace culture, become a raging gossip of good news. Look for real-life examples of employees serving each other and their customers. Then tell those stories over and over.

8. Engage people back

When someone tries to engage you in conversation, be conscious of your reaction. In a hectic work environment, it's easy to be dismissive. Take the time to open your ears – and your mind and heart.

9. Show your emotions

You're not a robot or a potted plant. If you're

thrilled, angry, enthused, confused, curious, whatever, let it show in a constructive way. It's more than okay to be human.

10. Be the real you

We've all met people who are one way one day – then someone else the next. It's no fun for anyone, including the chameleon. Get to know yourself, and remain true. Everyone will benefit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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