Employees Who Really Know Your Business are Your Most Valuable Resource

What is your company’s most valuable resource? Ask that question to any healthcare executive or any executive in any industry, and the most frequent response you’ll hear is, “Our people.” In fact, the statement, “our employees are our most valuable resource” is so overused it could be classified as business cliché. But the statement is more accurately classified as a business truism. Employees are flexible, improvable resources integral to the success of any firm, and, as such, they are indeed valuable. At the same time, employees, particularly those at lower, customer-facing levels, are frequently an underutilized resource. Why? Because few have the knowledge they need to reach their full potential. Few understand how and why their company operates. Consider the following scenarios:

**SCENARIO 1:**
A pharmaceutical company, Imaginary Labs, operating in a marketplace experiencing rapid and dramatic changes redefines itself to serving its end customers—the patients. Imaginary Labs overhauls everything from its leadership to its values to the multitude of business unit-level processes that generate its revenue. As part of the transformation, the company directs its sales representatives to change certain behaviors they use to engage customers. Lana, one of the company’s top performing sales reps, takes this direction into the field and promptly ignores it. Lana doesn’t set out to ignore the new guidelines. She knows they are important. Imaginary Labs’ managers, trainers, and even the CEO (in a recorded message) emphasized their importance. Yet, when face-to-face with the customer, Lana chooses to rely on old behaviors because she believes they will more effectively produce the results that both she and Imaginary Labs desire.

**SCENARIO 2:**
Anonymous Hospital, the largest hospital in its county, faces the twin challenges of losing a trauma program supported by taxpayer dollars and the launch of a competing hospital run by a national health system with deep pockets. To survive in the new landscape, Anonymous Hospital trims its budget and its staff and asks remaining employees to be vigilant about clamping down on costs. Rafael, a nurse in the oncology department, takes the challenges facing the hospital and its leaders to heart. In the course of his work, he notes that an expensive therapy could be dispensed more efficiently. He speaks to his manager who passes the information to the head of the department. Two weeks later, the department institutes new protocols that end up saving Anonymous Hospital $20,000 a month.

In Scenario 1, the employee becomes a major liability to the business. Though well intentioned, she makes a critical mistake that not only subverts the company’s mission but also taints its compliance efforts because she does not understand her organization’s business drivers. In Scenario 2, the employee becomes a major asset to the business. Though a number of his colleagues have been laid off, he remains dedicated to his organization. He understands its business drivers and is motivated to identify a way to help the company bolster its bottom line.

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In both scenarios, the employees are in lower-level, customer-facing positions. These are the type of employees that usually receive little more than a general orientation to their companies during a few days of training. In fact, a 2012 Gallup poll of U.S. workers revealed that many employees don’t know their company’s mission or what sets its brands apart from competitors. Only a meager 33% of healthcare workers surveyed said they really knew their company’s mission.¹ And decades of research conducted by Alliance Performance Systems and our clients shows even fewer healthcare workers become truly fluent in the operations of their organizations. They receive the business knowledge they need to meet, but not exceed, their job descriptions.

As a result of this knowledge void, many employees do not achieve their full potential and, as resources, do not deliver maximum ROI for their employers. (In other words, they are more likely to be Lana than Rafael.) When they truly understand their organization, these resources—these employees—can:

- Become effective mission and brand ambassadors for a firm by upholding its standards in ways customers can see
- Evaluate alternatives they are faced with more analytically and make better decisions that are in the true best interest of the company
- Ensure the culture of the business matches its strategy and vice versa

These powerful behaviors can help any business, and they can particularly help businesses experiencing painful change. Companies can more easily and more effectively overcome the pain associated with the adoption of a new mission, reorganization as a result of merger or acquisition, major expense reductions, etc. by ensuring all of their employees understand the business drivers behind the changes.

Alliance Performance Systems calls the transfer of this business knowledge to employees at all levels of a company Organizational Fluency. We have designed, developed, and implemented a variety of solutions to support the efforts of leading firms in the healthcare sector and other sectors to get their employees fluent in their organization. These solutions include Organizational Fluency 101 and 201™, GearWorks™, Apples & Oranges™, and Thinking Critically About Your Business™.

Each solution is customizable to your business and has been proven to boost the performance of customer-facing employees as well as their managers. The cause-and-effect relationship is clear: Employees that are fluent in how their organizations operate generate more ROI and truly become their company’s most valuable resource.

Source(s):