

Fall 11-5-2013

Our Universities: Culture and Energy

Walter V. Wendler

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, wendler@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/arch_hepc

Recommended Citation

Wendler, Walter V. "Our Universities: Culture and Energy." (Fall 2013).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Higher Education Policy Commentary by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

Our Universities: Culture and Energy

Third in a series on Corporate Culture...

A culture is created and sustained by human energy expended to attain shared purpose. Leadership sets the tone and pace of the development and expenditure of every member's contribution to corporate energy flow.

“The key to the mystery of a great artist is that for reasons unknown, he will give away his energies and his life just to make sure that one note follows another... and leaves us with the feeling that something is right in the world.”

Leonard Bernstein

Bernstein's energy expenditure principle applies to any work people undertake — from digging a ditch to conducting an orchestra, or teaching a student. Corporate energy is created by individuals working independently but motivated toward a common goal.

At **Toyota**, the *Creating an Energetic Workplace* initiative, introduced in 2006, was intended to develop strong relationships and a more energetic work environment. The world's largest vehicle manufacturer believed energetic communication would lead to “employee happiness.” **Toyota** wanted employees to have fun. This may sound like a truckload of naiveté on its way to **OZ** for a hard-boiled manager. But, the principles of workplace satisfaction, a.k.a. “happiness,” lead to increased effectiveness, even if it sounds trite to a sophisticate. As you might imagine, **Toyota's** empirical measurement and positive trends substantiated the “bliss” brigade. ***Effective leaders engage people in shared decision making.***

Jeff Wolf, president of **World Management Consultants**, says simply that “*people work for people, not companies or organizations.*” Energetic work environments are nurtured by people working towards shared goals. A **Gallup** study, based on interviews with 12 million workers, at 7,000 companies, conducted over 25 years, found that, “*...employee's relationship with the manager/supervisor largely determines the length of an employee's stay.*” Wages and benefits are important but down the list according to **Gallup**.

The **Saratoga Institute** conducted a survey of 12,000 people who had left their place of employment and it “*revealed that the main reason people quit is the manager's behavior.*”

Wolf confirms the **Corporate Leadership Council** contention that, “a high quality leader is the single most significant factor in attracting and retaining key talent.” **Effective leaders should convivially share values with staff, not for adoption, approval, or agreement but for transparency and insight... we have forgotten what honesty means.**

In a blog piece dubbed “**Alaka’I Managers are The New Energy Bunnies**”, Rosa Say declares “Energy is what sustains a vital business, and a lack of energy is what will kill it.” Human energy guided by a passion for excellence is the only thing that matters in an organization bent on a purposeful impact, says Say.

Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy reveal in “*Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time*”, in the **Harvard Business Review**, that longer hours do not always lead to higher levels of productivity. People may work 60 hours a week but attain only marginal effectiveness. These toiling souls get an “A” for effort, but sometimes a “C” for accomplishment. What’s more, taking a page from the **Toyota** experience, all that work with a lackluster return on investment may diminish “happiness.” Exhaustion does not equal excellence, even for a rabid fan hard work. **Effective leaders should celebrate value in all positive contributions.**

Schwartz and McCarthy suggest that “*in order to get more out of people you have to put more into them.*” This is not a technique for squeezing more juice from an orange, but rather giving the tree light and water, in turn producing oranges that have more juice. I concur with Tony Schwartz’s chapter head in the **ASTD Management Development Handbook: “The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working: More And More Less And Less.”** Schwartz’s assessment: Energy in the workplace creates a powerful corporate culture. He says, “*We are guided by a fatal assumption that the best way to get more work done is to work longer and more continuously.*”

The magic of energetic shared achievement rests on everyone’s shoulders. A positive corporate culture resonates with teamwork.

Such a mindset might exist at **Toyota**, but it must permeate a university. Distributed leadership and accomplishment at its zenith exists when human energy is expended to provide educational opportunity, by those who teach, to those who learn: ubiquitous and unbridled uniqueness.

Our universities should be fountains of human energy.