



Book 12

The Elements of Great Managing

Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter
Gallup Press, 2006
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Recommendation

The Gallup Organization has studied employment and management issues for decades. Rodd Wagner and James Harter distill its findings into 12 pivotal concepts that managers can use to develop and keep great employees. These range from creating strong teams to managing them so that they support corporate goals. *BooksInShort* lauds the way the authors illustrate their points with real-life examples. They show how and why managers implement each of the 12 factors, which are usefully broken down into business cases. The 12 principles are nicely interconnected. Each one explains a way to provide employees with direct management support. This means guaranteeing their loyalty to your firm by giving their jobs a context, providing a culture that supports their friendships, offering them clear career paths, and creating opportunities for them to grow and develop as people and employees. The authors explain why salary does matter, but also why it is not the most crucial aspect of employee management. They demonstrate how the worst managers view everything in financial terms, whereas the best managers give of themselves to support their people.

Take-Aways

- To create a peak job experience, build a successful, committed team.
- Supporting your employees begins with providing the tools and materials they need.
- Sincere, frequent praise is a powerful, cost-effective employee development tool.
- Help employees connect by explaining how their jobs support the firm's goals.
- Seek employees' opinions and actively listen to them.
- Employee satisfaction and achievement strongly correlate with having close friends at work.
- Use goals to help employees excel and travel their own career paths.
- Knowing your job also means learning how to handle extraordinary circumstances.
- When pay becomes a point of conflict, you have failed to handle other management issues.
- To be a great manager, support your employees instead of misusing them.

Summary

Prosper Through Your Employees

Yes, people come to work for a paycheck, but employees feel a big difference between putting in time going through the motions of the job, and being part of a high-performing team.

Now you can replicate the elements of a great work experience for your employees. After more than 10 million workplace interviews, Gallup found 12 concepts that great managers use to create quality employee experiences. These principles do not require rare talents or extreme performance. You simply have to apply them.

1. “Knowing What’s Expected”

Employees want to know what they are supposed to do to accomplish their assignments. A job description alone doesn’t ensure that an employee will perform well, and an employee can’t let the company down because his or her job description does not spell out necessary tasks. As a manager, coordinate with your staffers to make sure that you and they understand their jobs’ full implications, how their work connects to results and who to call when outside-the-norm events occur. Consistently doing a good job means performing well under varying, sometimes unpredictable conditions. Great managers enable their people to feel proud and empowered. Their leadership helps employees connect with their colleagues and their organization.

2. “Materials and Equipment”

Nothing is more frustrating than trying to perform a job without the right gear. Employees must be ready to work, but managers must facilitate that work by making sure that staff members have the equipment they need when they need it. Too many employers make the mistake of dictating work to their employees instead of listening to them and providing the resources they request. Front-line workers understand their jobs better than anyone else and can help the company improve by explaining what they’ve learned. When you implement employees’ suggestions, you reinforce positive behavior, garner good ideas and encourage their implementation. Conversely, if you pressure employees to work without timely access to needed materials or gear, you spur them to hoard and misapply resources. Such shortages increase stress and lower job satisfaction. Great employees love to be challenged, but they also want proper supplies, support and appreciation.

3. “The Opportunity to Do What I Do Best”

The intersection of what a person is good at doing and enjoys, and what his or her company really needs is the “sweet spot” of employment. A manager is responsible for aligning people with the jobs that are closest to their sweet spots, then helping their positions grow and develop into jobs they might not even realize they can do well. Helping a struggling employee is another pivotal management responsibility. Companies sometimes place good people in jobs that are wrong for them. Recognize this and redirect misplaced staffers so they can thrive. Act before they hurt the company or lose their confidence. Whether the person needs training or reassignment, handle such steps as opportunities, not as the results of failure.

4. “Recognition and Praise”

Showing appreciation for your employees is one of the most powerful tools at your disposal, so use it generously. Your employees will be delighted and you will get to know them more deeply, which enables you to manage them better – all at no cost. Wise managers know the power of frequent pats on the back and recognition. Caution: If you try to get by with insincere praise or a few shallow compliments, it will backfire. Sincere praise triggers a pleasure response in the brain, a feeling people want to repeat. If you evoke that response a few times, employees will act positively to gratify their hunger for more praise and that pleasure response. Being stingy with praise is a false economy. The rewards of positive feedback far outweigh the time and energy you invest.

5. “Someone at Work Cares About Me as a Person”

Great managers know that people are not machines. Although Henry Ford lamented that he had to hire a whole person to get the pair of hands he wanted, you know that getting the full benefit of each employee’s creativity and passion is much more valuable than hiring someone who merely fulfills a job’s required tasks. However, people need connections to other people. Job satisfaction and performance increase when employees know that their colleagues care about them and have a genuine interest in their lives. No matter how hard you push, you cannot force great work from people you debase or abuse. And your organization cannot compete if your employees provide only perfunctory performance. They must bring all of themselves to work. To nurture their involvement, create an environment that recognizes that real people have lives outside of work. When people feel that their employers respect their dignity, they work harder.

6. “Someone at Work Encourages My Development”

Human beings are not static. When managers give employees opportunities to grow and pursue individual career paths, employees are willing to stretch to accomplish big goals. If you provide them with mentors, their enthusiasm becomes job-performance rocket fuel. People learn by watching masters and imitating what they see. When a mentor shows an employee how to do a task and how the task connects to results and rewards, the employee develops confidence in the mentor, in himself or herself, and in the company’s ability to recognize great performance. Your self-confidence and your confidence in your company will inspire your employees.

7. “My Opinions Seem to Count”

You will undo all your progress if your employees get the message that their viewpoints do not matter. Do not wait for them to push into your field of vision. Ask for their opinions about their jobs, the company and your management. You don’t have to agree with them, but don’t disparage anything they say. Simply by acknowledging them, and demonstrating that you hear and understand what they are saying, you give them powerful affirmation. They will likely give you ideas and information you can use to improve your team’s performance. When that happens, praise the person and the team.

8. “A Connection With the Mission of the Company”

Don’t be satisfied teaching people solely how to perform their tasks. To make each staffer’s work more meaningful, demonstrate how it connects to the team’s goals and the company’s performance. People who realize that their tardiness or sloppiness could compromise another pivotal operation will perform their jobs even better. In fact, they will go out of their way to deal with anything that compromises their ability to do good work. They won’t wait passively until someone else fixes a problem; they will contact someone who can fix it. As a manager, you want this kind of personal investment.

9. “Coworkers [Are] Committed to Doing Quality Work”

When you ask people to describe their peak employment experiences, they usually cite working on a great team. This is because high-performing teams encapsulate the most important aspects of a meaningful job experience. Great teams know what they are doing. Team members support each other. They coordinate their tasks, bond and recognize each other’s contributions.

“Matching a person to the right job, or a job to the right person, is one of the most complicated responsibilities any manager will face.”

Your management approach can foster or impede your team’s success. No matter how well things are going, never stop managing. Continually take the pulse of the team and each team member. Be ready when team membership changes because of promotions, moves or departures. Have a possible list of replacements in mind, so you can minimize the sense of crisis or disruption such changes can cause.

“There is no such thing as an inherently meaningless job. There are conditions that make the seemingly most important roles trivial and...make ostensibly awful work rewarding.”

Keep your team committed by helping members stay focused on their success rather than on any disruptive events. Dealing with outside issues is your job.

10. “A Best Friend at Work”

Employees who have close friends at work have the lowest turnover and the most positive performance ratings. Polls with sentences that use the specific phrase “best friend” have the highest predictive power for employee performance. Having deep friendships with colleagues greatly enriches a person’s work life. Friends can communicate more freely, exhibit more trust and support each other.

“‘Knowing what’s expected’ [means having] a detailed understanding of how what one person is supposed to do fits in with what everyone is supposed to do.”

Arriving at work and entering a friendly atmosphere is much more inspiring than coming into a sterile, hostile interpersonal environment. Who wants to feel invisible or disliked? As a manager, foster friendships and support employees who are the least able to find friends for themselves.

11. “Talking About Progress”

Unless you are in a position to decide your company’s appraisal methods, you have to use the tools the firm gives you. However, you can choose how effectively you use them. Too often managers treat appraisals as trials to overcome. But done right, appraisals can be the culmination of employee development and career progress. Work closely with your employees so that nothing in the appraisal is surprising. Spend time together preparing goals for the next year that represent not only expected and stretch performance, but also a step forward on the individual’s career path. All employees should know where they are headed, and how their performance enables or hinders their progress.

12. “Opportunities to Learn and Grow”

Although a few people prefer learning one job and staying with it, most people regard such monotony with a special kind of horror. Nearly everyone wants to learn and grow. However, many employees will avoid taking risks if they perceive that the company will punish them for even the smallest failures. To reap the rewards that come from helping employees improve, even with some risk, create an environment that supports risk taking and the inevitable failures that accompany it. Back your staff members in learning needed skills and securing educational opportunities.

“Managers who fail to [use] positive feedback are not only handicapping their own managerial effectiveness, they also diminish the power of the salaries they are paying.”

Each person should become familiar with several jobs within the team’s scope so the group has coverage during absences or transitions. Your team members will trust and appreciate you more if they know you will help them advance and not hold them back for selfish reasons. Be ready for change due to the growth you encouraged rather than trying to stunt growth in order to prevent change – not that you can prevent it, anyway.

“The Problem of Pay”

For most employees, salary is fundamental. However, pay usually is not a job’s most important characteristic. If you have all 12 of the managerial elements in place, you rarely will lose a staffer over money unless your pay scale is very uncompetitive. Wages become the most contentious issue when the 12 elements are not managed well. Employees can’t change a toxic culture, but they can demand more money for enduring it. Yet, pay will not cure performance problems, and raises lose their motivational power quickly. Even bonuses can become an expected part of a pay package, so their absence can cause problems.

“Before a person can deliver what he should as a manager, he must first receive what he needs as an employee.”

Be aware that employees talk about their salaries. Trying to discourage them from doing so makes things worse by fostering rumors. Develop a rational pay plan that rewards great work without overpaying (easier said than done). To keep great people without breaking the bank, implement the 12 management concepts.

“The Heart of Great Managing”

All CEOs say employees are their companies’ greatest assets. This praise is usually meaningless, because these executives’ actions contradict their words. Gallup’s findings show that the managers who elicit the most out of their employees are those who give their employees the most – not necessarily in terms of wages, but in

humanity, dignity, and support. The managers who derive the best financial performances from their employees are the ones who are the least motivated by money. If you work hard for your people, they will work hard for you; ultimately, everyone will benefit.

About the Authors

Rodd Wagner is a Gallup Organization principal and an expert on high-performance management and the interplay between employee commitment and company performance. **James K. Harter**, Ph.D., a chief scientist at Gallup, focuses on its international workplace-management program. He has written or co-authored more than 1,000 research studies.
