

leadership instalments

Work as a Creative Zone

By Dan Gaynor

"Happiness lies in the joy of achievement and the thrill of creative effort." Franklin D. Roosevelt

A WRITER FINISHES THE FINAL EDITS OF A PIECE SHE has been working on for months, she sits back and considers the work, she feels a sense of satisfaction. A framing carpenter walks onto a work site, he finds a foundation, a set of plans, and a lumber package. He works for five days, ensuring everything is where it should be, it is square, tight and well built - he stands back and considers his work, the sense of satisfaction he feels brings him back for more. My wife Sarah, discovers a new recipe, she prepares it with care, sets the table, and presents the meal, she feels that same sense of satisfaction felt by the writer and the carpenter. All are enjoying something common to the human experience - the thrill of creative effort. Creativity comes in many forms. Given the right conditions, we are all motivated by it.

Leaders who tap this creative energy bring out the best in those they lead, so don't leave it to chance. Make your workplace, wherever you are, a creative zone. Work means more when we feel as though we are part of bringing something into being - this is the essence of creative effort. So how do good leaders build creative zones? Focusing on talent and workplace development are two good options.

Let's start with talent. The carpenter has a talent for his work, the writer a talent for hers, and yes, Sarah has a talent for cooking that anyone who has joined us at our table will attest to. Exercising talent feels good. I don't have the talent for carpentry, so it doesn't provide much of a creative outlet for me. Good leaders help people understand where their talent is, and then they make sure they are in roles where they can exercise it regularly. They also help people see when they are in the wrong roles and sometimes they are the catalysts to resolve a mismatch. Working in a role we lack the talent for is a recipe for frustration.

Workplace development is another great creative opportunity. Most people want to be part of a great workplace - one they can be proud of - and when leaders invite them into the process of creating it, they

usually find enthusiastic participants. Good leaders engage their employees in workplace development, tapping into their feedback about how things can be changed for the better. I've heard employees point out the need to be more supportive of colleagues, focus more on quality, or work on accountability, as just a few examples. Good leaders will take this feedback, blend it with their own observations, and then come up with a recipe for improvement. Every workplace is a constant work in progress and employees should be a part of the process.



Workplace development provides another worthwhile benefit. Over the next ten years, as baby boomers begin to scale back or retire, the well developed workplaces will become magnets for talent as the competition for people heats up. Leaders who engage their employees in creating great workplaces will gain a significant competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate.

We are all creative beings. Engage employees in the thrill of creative effort, by exercising their talents and creating a great workplace and you'll be rewarded with a motivated hard working team.

Discussion Questions:

What are your core talents and how often are you able to exercise them at work?

Where are the best opportunities on your team to get people into the creative zone.

When was the last time you asked your team where they think the workplace can and should be improved?

For more on workplace development call to arrange a workshop.

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