Instead of Focusing on Competitors, Tend Your Own Garden

Description

What are some red flags that show a leader and/or a company is in trouble? There are many. Two that resonate with me are a) a leader saying, â??You stole (or are trying to steal) my employee!â?• and b) an obsession with the competition.

Let us start with the first one. People make decisions to leave or stay on their own. Instead of spending time worrying about people being recruited away, spend that time taking actions to retain those working for you. When one finger is pointing out, three fingers are pointing back.

The first time I heard the â??stealingâ?• statement was when I was a department director in a hospital. An employee from one department left to work for another department. While the situation could have been handled better, once the director of the first department found out what had happened, he went up to the leader of the second department and said, â??You stole one of my best employees.â?• It bothered me then and bothers me now. I did say to the person, â??No one steals anyone. People have the right to make choices.â?•

When presenting at organizations, I ask the CEO to close their eyes. This makes my next request easier. I ask the group: â??In the past 30 days, how many of you have been reached out to from another organization, a recruiting firm, and/or a staffing agency?â?• About 40 percent of the hands go up. I then say, â??In the past three months, how many of you have been approached?â?• and about 75 percent of the hands go up. I then say to the CEO, â??Open your eyes.â?• The closing of the eyes is not necessary, but it does bring some levity to the issue I go into next.

People are being reached out to regularly. So each day, the current employer needs to focus on retention. Each day we either are building trust with employees or losing it. People stay at places they feel have their best interests at heart. At times showing we have an employeeâ??s best interests at heart can even mean letting them know of other opportunities.

Here is a scenario: A senior leader received a call from a recruiting firm to ask about a leader who worked there. Why? Because the recruiter felt the person would be a good fit for an opening they were trying to fill. The senior leader said they were sure the person was not interested and never shared the reach-out with the employee. When the employee found out the leader had chosen not to tell them,

they immediately took action to leave.

Even if the senior leader was right and the person would not be interested, letting the person decide that on their own is the right thing to do. Leaders who develop and support people even knowing they may leave are those who have no problem attracting people to their department or organization. Plus, this level of transparency creates strong lifelong relationships.

Now letâ??s talk about attitudes toward competition in general. â??You are competing with me?â?• The tone of this statement matters. I find some feel that competition should not happen. If you are having success, you can count on competition. Of course, it is good to see what product, service, pricing, hours, and so forth a competitor offers. However, the great majority of the time, your thoughts and energy are better spent on your own product, pricing, hours, and, most importantly, talent.

It is hypocritical to like competition when one is buying something for their company and getting competitive bids yet to be unhappy when *they* have competition. My wife, Rishy, opened the first coffee shop in downtown Pensacola when the downtown had little going for it. Today, there are quite a few coffee shops, food trucks with coffee, and pop-ups that sell coffee. In fact, one is right across the street. When asked how she felt about all the competition, her answer was, â??It is good for the city.â?•

A few tips:

1. Every day take steps to retain the talent currently working in your organization. This means focusing on career development as part of retention. Helping people achieve their career goals is the right thing to do, even though it may mean they leave. The last two radio/TV broadcasters for the Pensacola Blue Wahoos, a Double-A Minor League Baseball team, have gone on to the Major Leagues. Tommy Thrall is now with the Cincinnati Reds. Tommyâ??s replacement, Chris Garagiola, was recently hired by the Arizona Diamondbacks. After the Chris announcement, the Blue Wahoos received over 100 inquiries into working for them. Get the reputation for retaining and developing talent.
2. Practice daily â??relationship rounding.â?• â??Roundingâ?• is a term from the medical field that began with physicians rounding on hospitalized patients every day. Why? To check their vitals, monitor their progress, and provide great care. Similarly, leaders can round on employees to build relationships and trust. Be interested in their lives and make sure the work environment works for them.
3. Pay attention to personal touches. Take actions beyond questions like, â??Do you have what you need to do your job today?â?• Find ways to say and do things that demonstrate you care.
4. Ask yourself honestly: *Am I overly focused on or upset with the competition?* If so, you may have already lost or may be in the process of losing. Every day, take a fresh look at your products and service. When companies look to others, itâ??s because they are not overly satisfied with their own current service and/or product. The issue is not the competition; it is the lack of retention of the current client. Stay close to each customer.

Usually when we find ourselves complaining about stolen employees or worrying about competitors, itâ??s a sign that we need to tend our own garden. Years ago, a CEO was at a meeting with the senior team. After looking at the results, he looked up and said to the team, â??I have found the problem. It is us.â?•

Each day we are either getting better or worse. Letâ??s all get better. When we do, weâ??ll likely find that issues like â??stolenâ?• employees and customers tend to fix themselves.

Date Created
January 18, 2022
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