

## Why “Best Practices” Won’t Get You the Best People

*HR and management can be trendy professions. “Personnel” is now “Human Capital” and I’m not sure anybody is better off for the name change! To make matters worse, we tend to think if we just do the same collection of things they do at TrendyCorp, we’ll have the same high margins and low turnover rates. Wrong!*

### THE PROBLEM:

Finding and copying “best practices” *does* help spread good tools and techniques from one company to another. It’s a very good thing for tactical ideas and processes. However, strategically managing your organization or its culture by “best practices” is a near-sure path to frustration, added expense and an exhausting search for the next thing.

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### MY PREDICTION:

The best analogy I can think of is to my current obsession with raw and whole foods. In Dr. Fuhman’s book *Eat to Live*, he makes the point that science can articulate and understand the major elements of a food that give it a nutritional bang, but science has failed miserably at understanding good food is not just the sum of its parts or a list of vitamins. Something great happens when the right food is delivered in context and in a way the body recognizes as real food consistent with its needs.

Most best practices are like the Vitamin D Wonder puts in its bread. OK, it’s better than no Vitamin D, but you should not depend on Wonder Bread for your Vitamin D! Same goes for most employee engagement theories, compensation plans, wellness programs, performance management systems, and so on. Much better than nothing, but not sufficient.

So, if your goal is to hire, keep and grow the best people for your roles, because you know you will perform better if you have the best people, should you simply find and apply a variety of best practices to your current model? Most of your competitors do just that!

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### HOW TO PREPARE:

I had lunch with a very good friend recently where we talked about this concept. How can they improve both the candidates they attract and the employees who decide to stay and grow with them? We talked about the industry, what people like and hate about it and why some competitors seem to get the cream of the crop. It won’t be solved by adding more “workplace vitamins.” It’s more about how the workplace works in context with the employees’ lives.

For example, assume your industry is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and serves the public. NOT an easy environment. The schedule is a major problem and no-shows disrupt everyone’s day, plus, turnover is awful. Best practices would tell you to analyze your turnover rate and make tactical changes to your processes, improving the rate marginally each year.

What if we took a very serious look at scheduling in a new way? A very new way. What if we gave every 90-day employee the right to pick one day each week that we will NEVER schedule them for work? They can promise it to their family and there will be no exceptions. What if we decided we will pay enough by day 180 that this job will fulfill the realistic needs of a high caliber employee and improve both our retention and service? What if we place periodic rewards in the system after key employment milestones that no one else in our industry even considers? How about an education fund for the employee or a child? What if we prove to Operations that the financial impact of our current long-term superstars is so out of proportion to the average employee that this unique approach is easy to support?

My point is that best practices help us all improve but they are not likely to make fundamental shifts in your model or culture leading to success in the future. Think about *your* industry, *your* people, *your* competition and how *you* can become the place where the best people want to work!

Contact me directly if I can help you or your team.

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*Executive Scan* is written by CAI's CEO, Bruce Clarke, JD.

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