

People Issues are the Crabgrass in the Lawn of Business*

I just met with the CEO of a local investment services company. He is an experienced banker and thoughtful advisor to individuals and institutions. He spoke of the time and frustration spent on people issues.

The photo to the right is crabgrass in my lawn in early spring. I used the crabgrass-preventing fertilizer sold at the Big Box. What went wrong?



Photo by Bruce Clarke

NOTHING WENT WRONG

Really, nothing went wrong. It went just as it goes every year. I put too much faith in one chemical and ignored the other causes of this persistent pest. Causes such as poor soil (that's all we have in Raleigh!), cheap grass seed, bad "pH", thin grass cover, poor drainage, and so on.

Just like crabgrass, there is rarely ONE solution to recurring employee issues. In my view, interrelated causes and conditions cause 80% of people problems, while only 20% of such things are truly isolated and unpredictable.

FOCUS ON THE 80%

What are the patterns in your people issues? Do you spend excessive time with employees who do not "get it"? Do you have excessive attendance issues? What about turnover and pay complaints? Do you and your managers get involved in "he said/she said" matters, whining, blaming, hurt feelings and personal conflict? Maybe you see a lack of personal accountability? If so, these are largely preventable problems.

ONE CHEMICAL WON'T DO IT

Just like crabgrass, there is no single solution guaranteed to handle all people issues.

A common formula for problems is: Misunderstood Goals + Poor Communication + Conflict Avoidance = Crabgrass. Lack of basic management skills, failure to recognize the importance of clarity, and absence of a vision for people to understand: all can combine to produce the frustration we experience. Maybe a periodic chemical spray (such as an all-employee meeting) will beat back some of the weeds, but we cannot expect a complex set of issues to yield that easily.

ASK YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

"If you had the unilateral power to make the changes needed to reduce these preventable people issues, what changes would you make?" Force a 15 minute monologue by each leadership team member followed by blunt discussion. If each of you do a good job taking this exercise seriously (and you are honest) some important themes will emerge. Taking a comprehensive approach to a complex problem is hard, but it can help you create a workplace employees want to work in everyday...with less frustration for the leaders.

I may not choose to amend my soil, regularly lime the yard and buy the premium seed, so I should not be surprised at the results. Your workplace, your employees and your own mental health are worth more effort.

*Russ Walden, Ridgewood Hotels

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

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Executive Scan provides a quick update on internal and external issues affecting your workplace with timely advice on ways to respond. It is provided to members and friends of CAI.

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

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