

Article location: <http://www.fastcompany.com/resources/talent/bksje/121306.html>

December 13, 2006

Find Their Calling

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How satisfied are your talented people with their everyday tasks? Do you know enough about your employees' values to answer that question? Values are not difficult to uncover, but they are powerful forces in an employee's decision to stay or leave. Imagine your employees as your customers. Now, what do they value most? How can you help them attain it?

The risk of losing employees because of conflicts over values is far greater than the risk of losing them because of compensation. Values define what we consider to be important. They are the standards by which we measure our bottom-line needs. The more your employees' work incorporates their values, the more they will find that work meaningful, purposeful, and important.

When values are left out of the work equation, the work may still get done, but without the energy and commitment. Eventually, either you or your employees will notice. Today's employees across all generations want to find value and meaning in their work. Our lives aren't as compartmentalized as they once were, and more employees are demanding a better blending of work and home life.

Organizations have vision statements, mission statements, and values statements, but they rarely have a process that helps employees determine the link between those statements and their own values.

Any of the following can help you start a conversation about values:

- What do you need most from your work? Does the job deliver?
- What makes for a really good day?
- What would you miss if you left this job?
- What did you like best about other jobs you've had?
- Tell me about a time when you really felt energized at work.

These questions can be asked during any one on one conversation that you have with your direct reports. Many managers add these to performance management or development planning sessions.

Another reason (if you need it!) to learn more about values is to insure smoother functioning of your team. Organizations are more team-based than ever. Yet the failure to understand one another's values leads to discord on teams. The team that cannot draw on its members' values may end up arguing, wasting time, and failing. Team members lose heart when organizational values and their values do not mesh. Be aware of the individual values on your team and be willing to discuss them. You will strengthen the group and increase its members' job satisfaction.

Diversity of values will build strength in your team. Those who value creativity will be your innovators. Those who value independence will work productively for long stretches without prodding from you. Those who value order and routine will be your dependable, solid citizens. Don't try to make the solid citizen into a creative innovator. Recognize what each person values and mine those values for the sake of the whole

team. Here are some questions that might stimulate a team discussion about values:

- What are the values of our work team? How are we similar? How are we different?
- How might our differences get in the way?
- Under what circumstances or pressures do we find our values colliding?
- What can we learn from someone whose values are different from our own?

Finally, be aware of your own values -- and their impact on your employees. We have looked at hundreds of transcripts from exit interviews. We were amazed at how many talented employees left because their values conflicted with those of their immediate supervisor or manager.

We invite you to learn more about your own values by taking the free survey called "Invest in Your Values™ [1]." Not only will this survey tell you the values that are most important at this point in time, it will also ask you to consider whether or not your values are aligned with your current job. This may be an important conversation for you to have with your *own* manager!

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Links:

[1] <http://www.careersystemsintl.com/invval.htm>

[2] <http://www.fastcompany.com/fasttalk/forum.html?f=334>