



THE BIG PICTURE

Scott Adams, creator of Dilbert, says that *some times the big picture is hidden in the details*. At a point in history where many business leaders are concerned about retention of employees, focusing on the big picture **and** the details are critically important.

What is the big picture? It's different from an employer's vs. an employee's viewpoint. The differences are important and have direct implications on the details of how we operate our companies.

To an employer, the big picture entails: sales; operating profits; satisfied, repeat customers/clients; corporate values and image; competitors; good staff, etc. To an employee, the big picture is less complex and centers around one question: is this a worthwhile place to work?

Why is it important to know whether your employees view your company as a worthwhile place to work? Three key reasons stand out. First, this is a time of record low unemployment. This fact, compounded by changing demographics, is creating skill shortages in most parts of the country. Second, there is a free agent mentality thriving in the country. Employees are looking out for themselves in cold and calculating ways that often translate to *what have you done for me lately?* They have learned because of corporate downsizings that loyalty doesn't pay bills, so they consciously sell their talents to the highest bidder. Since we're operating in a tight labor market it means that they are in control! Third, the viability and success of your organization depends on the individuals that work for you.

What workplace attributes, that is details, can result in your company becoming an employer of choice? Here are some tips:

- **Respect employees' time.** Don't reward face time. That is, don't implicitly or explicitly recognize employees for quantity (e.g., long days, long weeks, endless months, forgone vacations). Understand that the company gets quality when people lead balanced lives.
- **Encourage an organizational culture focused on effectiveness.** Cultivate brevity (e.g., in meetings, memos, reports) and efficiency in processes and systems.
- **Eliminate the drones.** Fire the protected. You know, they're the ones who did something great in 1986, have been just showing up ever since, and now irritate almost everyone (except perhaps a single, important person in management).
- **Stress continuous development.** Support business focused training that emphasizes company performance as well as personal growth opportunities. Make teaching and coaching part of everyone's job description.
- **Promote experimentation.** Create a cooperative and flexible workplace, which encourages creativity. Loosen up as much as you can (e.g., dress codes, office decor, the format of internal memos).
- **Provide challenge.** Stretch employees and give them responsibility before you think you should.
- **Recognize accomplishments and growth.** Use pay and bonuses, but don't forget

- the value of paid vacations, peer recognition, sabbaticals, theater/sports tickets, etc.
- **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Talk to employees about important business matters. How can they help to achieve business goals and objectives if you don't talk about the business plan or the roles they are supposed to take?

If you are committed to sustained, profitable growth, you've got to keep the best. You can accomplish this goal by paying attention to details. But, the details must add up to the perception **and** the reality that your company is a worthwhile place to work. However, worthwhile must be defined in employees' terms, not yours. Therefore, one of the greatest skills you can learn is to see the company through their eyes. And, that may help you see the big picture.

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