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# The Human Factor Of Sustainability

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We all know it's become a no-brainer for companies—large and small—to keep one eye invested on developing and implementing sustainable practices.

I'm convinced that having intelligent standards for environmental sustainability—and putting them wisely into play wherever possible—brings about numerous rewards over time. Companies will see benefits not only in terms of helping the planet, but in growing positive public perception for their brand, increasing the support of employees, cost reductions and even profitability.

Yet a wise business leader should recognize that a sustainability model is most easily applied to your human resources first.

Intelligent management of your workforce represents the low-hanging fruit. What better place to start implementing what I believe represents the future as a sound and logical business paradigm, than with your people.

Sustainability has best been described as both a discipline and a mindset. In many ways, however, it seems easier to apply this model to your facilities and functions within a business, as metrics are easier to create and watch.

Enter the Human Factor!

If the Millennial workforce has taught us anything it's that workplace culture must now be a primary consideration for a successful business. Whether or not one agrees in philosophy, data shows that close to two-thirds of all Millennials practically start their new jobs already thinking about getting their next one.

This makes all of us cringe a little when we consider the investment of time and money a company is going to put into its people. Studies clearly show that employee turnover has a range of far-reaching costs. Business owners can not only get stuck with tens of thousands of dollars in training and productivity losses, but turnover can potentially throw a

monkey wrench into smooth in-house functioning and, worse yet, client relations.



But the question remains: How does a business owner create sustainability around their workforce?

In his groundbreaking book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Austrian psychologist Viktor Frankl identified “purpose” as the primary deciding factor in whether some people survived in concentration camps during World War II. A survivor himself who endured three years in different camps, Frankl came to believe that when an individual is invested in a purpose that has meaning for them personally, they will endure and ultimately thrive.

From a business standpoint this philosophy speaks directly to an employee’s sense of meaning in their job. And I can guarantee you that their sense of meaning is absolutely going to correlate to their job performance.

That’s why steps need to be taken to not just retain good employees with perks and amenities, but redirect them to find continued meaning in their role with your company.

### **Skill Sets, Like Businesses, Evolve**

I won’t argue that it’s the company’s responsibility to pander to an employee’s whims and changes in passion. That would be ridiculous.

At the same time it’s in the company’s best interest to proffer a flexible future for its employees, if at all possible. Hiring from within is one obvious example, but why not do more to expand in-house opportunities based on evolving skill sets among your individual employees?

A clever human resources director is going to keep tabs on how your people’s responsibilities and focuses evolve. Let that help lead the future.

### **Learn a Lesson from the Nonprofit Sector**

For most nonprofit professionals, meaning is the prime motivation. But nonprofits don’t have a cornerstone on

purpose. The value and purpose of your company is significant as well and employees need to know that.

Recognize and celebrate the contributions of your business. Let your workforce know why what they do is important.

## There's More to Retention than Just Involvement

Some personnel experts will argue that the secret to productivity and retention is keeping employees happy. But bells and whistles are just part of what drives them.

It's worthwhile to understand exactly where a worker finds their meaning in their job. It may not be the obvious place.

Knowing what drives that particular employee can be the secret to retaining them. Again, it may be something due to evolve, and knowing that could turn a potential personnel loss into a redirection that will benefit everyone.

A wise business leader can start implementing sustainable practices immediately with regard to employees. Employee retention, in my estimation, is not just about making your workers happy, but helping them—and you—find the real meaning in what they do.

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