

memo

CORPORATE HR

TO: Lailah Banks
FROM: Roger Hemmings
DATE: September 28, 2018
SUBJECT: Addressing Our High-Priority Personnel Issues

As you requested after last month's State of the Workforce meeting, I've been exploring potential responses to the top three personnel issues the team identified: job satisfaction, position readiness, and succession planning. We were all concerned about the cost and time commitment required to tackle these big issues, so the consensus reached at the meeting was to prioritize the issues and address them one at a time.

However, I believe there is a manageable way to address all three issues at once.

Areas of Concern: Finding Common Threads

The "big three" issues definitely feel overwhelming when we consider the changes needed in order to make meaningful improvements in all of them. There is hope in the details, however. Common threads run through all three areas, and we can address many of the problems with a single solution.

To review the three issues:

- **Job satisfaction:** Results from the last four internal surveys show a disturbing pattern of dissatisfaction, with many employees expressing uncertainty about where their careers are heading, confusion about how they fit into the big picture, and anger about not being given fair consideration for promotions.
- **Position readiness:** Managers frequently complain to us that our emphasis on promoting from within is difficult for them to adhere to because they can't find enough employees who are ready to move into positions of greater responsibility. Employees usually have the technical skills, but managers say that many lack the vision to see how their individual efforts contribute to the larger effort or lack the professionalism needed to function at a high level around customers, executives, and business partners.
- **Succession planning:** This has been a priority for several years, but we never seem to make much headway toward putting a real program in place. We've solved one side of the equation—identifying all the critical managerial and professional roles where we're vulnerable to employees leaving or being promoted—but we haven't figured out how to identify and prepare promising candidates to move into these positions.

As I dug through these issues, two themes kept popping up: a lack of shared purpose and inadequate relationship building.

← The subject line establishes a connection to a topic previously discussed without divulging the main idea of the proposal (which uses the indirect approach).

← The opening paragraph serves as a reminder of their previous discussion, the task he was given, and the expectations about how he would approach it.

← This single-sentence paragraph is the attention-getter in the AIDA model; it promises a solution that is better than expected.

← This section summarizes the previous discussion while laying the groundwork for introducing a key reason for the proposal he is going to make, which is that he has found a couple of common themes in the three areas of concern.

← He introduces those two themes, which shape the proposal he is about to make. This works as the interest stage of the AIDA model, since it presents an intriguing and unexplored angle on issues previously discussed.

(continued)

Figure 14.8 Internal Proposal

The manager in charge of his company's employee development efforts has a solution to three worrisome workforce issues that he has previously discussed with his boss, the director of human resources. He uses this memo-format proposal to outline a new employee mentoring program and suggest how the company can get started on it.⁸

The Lack of Shared Purpose

The company has always prided itself on attracting the best people in every functional specialty, but I believe this has resulted in an overemphasis on hard skills and individual output, to the detriment of soft skills and an overall sense of teamwork and shared contribution. It's no surprise that so many employees feel adrift and disconnected, when we don't foster a communal sense of how the company functions as an integrated enterprise. We have some of the brightest employees in the industry, but many are too focused on the tactics of their own jobs.

← Here he offers more information about the two themes he discovered as he continues to lay out the reasons for his proposed solution.

Inadequate Relationship Building

After reviewing the employee survey data, I wanted to get a more personal take on these issues, so I interviewed more than two dozen professional staffers and managers across all divisions. These interviews uncovered another troubling dynamic: We're not very good at building professional relationships throughout the organization.

Employees and their managers tend to stay isolated within their functional silos and don't seem to understand or even care about the challenges faced by their colleagues in other departments. One market analyst described cross-functional meetings as "strangers forced to cooperate with strangers." Managers trying to fill promotional opportunities sometimes don't know where to look because they rarely get to know employees outside their own chain of command. And every professional staffer I talked to expressed some variation of feeling lost, with no one to turn to for confidential career advice.

Proposed Solution: Employee Mentoring

Clearly, we have some challenges on our hands. The good news is that we have the potential to solve many of them with an employee mentoring program. Here is a brief overview of mentoring programs, their benefits, potential stumbling blocks, and a recommended strategy for launching our own program.

← At this point, he is ready to shift from "selling the problem" and laying the groundwork to presenting his solution.

Common Features of Mentoring Programs

Here are the key features common to most mentoring programs:

- It's a formal program matches interested employees with managers and senior professional staff in one-on-one coaching relationships. The coaching can involve job-specific challenges, work-life balance, workplace conflicts, or anything else the participants decide is useful.
- Employees and their mentors meet or at least talk on a regular schedule. Continuity is essential.

← This brief overview of employee mentoring programs establishes common ground with his reader, so he can be sure they are thinking about the same thing.

(continued)

Figure 14.8 Internal Proposal (continued)

- HR provides the “matchmaking service” to help find the optimum pairings and manage demand, but isn’t involved in the actual mentoring.
- Mentoring relationships are confidential, giving both sides the freedom to talk openly.

Potential Benefits of Mentoring Programs

Mentoring can go a long way toward solving these problems of shared purpose and relationship building, but companies report an even wider range of benefits from their mentoring programs:

- Employees can learn how to professionally navigate the corporate environment, from subtle issues such as business etiquette to broader questions such as how they contribute to company growth.
- Employees can discuss problems and worries with a trusted advisor, without fear of retribution.
- Managers gain insights into the challenges employees are facing, beyond the tactical demands of their jobs, which will help them manage and lead more effectively.
- Managers and employees learn about the challenges and contributions of other functional areas, which will foster better cooperation between departments.
- Through their mentors, employees can meet other managers, executives, and influential senior staff, expanding their networks within the company and opening more career doors.
- Managers can monitor the progress of promising employees and guide them into new opportunities.
- As an employee benefit, mentoring can help us attract a wider and more diverse pool of outside job candidates.
- Mentoring can boost productivity by helping employees find the best ways to invest their time and creative energy.
- Proactive mentoring can help the company get the full potential from employees who don’t feel like they are part of the “in crowd” within the company.
- Through “reverse mentoring,” senior staff and managers may have opportunities to learn about digital media use and other valuable skills they haven’t had to embrace in their careers.

The bottom-line impact of mentoring programs isn’t always easy to measure, but my research found some compelling figures. For example, companies have seen

← Here he presents the general benefits of mentoring programs in a way that connects them to the two themes he identified earlier.

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Figure 14.8 Internal Proposal (continued)

turnover drop by as much as 20 percent in the year after mentoring was launched, and the majority of employees and mentors alike report improved job satisfaction as a result of being involved in mentoring.

Costs and Potential Challenges

The benefits of mentoring do need to be weighed against costs and some potential challenges:

- Many companies find themselves with more interested employees than their programs can support, so we need to manage the demand in a fair and transparent way.
- There will be some direct and indirect costs, including training for mentors, an automated system for matching mentors with employees as the program scales up, and clerical and supervisory workload for HR.
- Mentoring requires time and energy, so mentors' workloads will need to be adjusted accordingly.
- Mentoring can create conflicts with employees' direct supervisors, so HR will need to offer mediation.

We can predict some of these costs and complexities, but the most accurate way to assess them will be to run a pilot program, as I propose in the next section.

Next Steps: Develop a Business Case and Launch a Pilot Program

The research makes a clear case for mentoring, provided it is planned carefully and managed well. I propose that we develop a formal business case for a mentoring program and present it to the Executive Council. We need top-down support and the participation of executives themselves as mentors, so C-level buy-in is essential.

Rather than launching companywide, I think we should start with a limited pilot program, with perhaps two or three dozen participants. This will let us fine-tune the program and get a clearer estimate of costs in order to refine budgets before scaling up.

My rough estimate is that the pilot program will require one full-time staff member in HR to facilitate matchmaking, mediate conflicts, analyze results, and plan the companywide rollout. This new position will have a loaded cost of approximately \$90k. I shouldn't have any problem clearing out this much in my operating budget, probably by canceling the lowest-rated training courses (as we've been discussing doing anyway).

Can I get on your calendar sometime next week to go over the potential structure of the program and answer any questions or concerns you may have?

← Sharing the positive outcomes that other companies have experienced should heighten his boss's desire to explore the possibility of starting a program.

← He is open about the downsides of mentoring programs, which addresses some potential objections and helps maintain his credibility on the subject.

← "Next steps" signals his shift to the action phase of the AIDA model. He outlines a brief plan to move forward and concludes by asking for a meeting to get things rolling.

Figure 14.8 Internal Proposal (continued)