

Leadership tactics

Want to make a resolution that not only improves your bottom line but actually has staying power? Quint Studer, author of the bestseller "Results That Last," offers five simple tips for turning it all around ...fast.

As you look back over 2007, you're feeling a vague sense of discontent. Business is sluggish. Several key employees have left. And with new competitors springing up every day, you need to be at the top of your industry. Oh, things are not *terrible*—not yet—but they could be a lot better. You need to turn things around, and you know you need to make some big changes in the upcoming year. Problem is, you're not sure what they are. A new improvement initiative? A hot new product? A new executive team? Quint Studer has a suggestion: Make 2008 the year you focus on leadership. Not leaders, mind you—*leadership*.

"Solid business results that stand the test of time do so for one reason and one reason only: consistently excellent leadership," insists Studer, author of *Wall Street Journal* bestseller *Results That Last: Hardwiring Behaviors That Will Take Your Company to the Top* (Wiley, October 2007, ISBN: 978-0-471-75729-0, \$24.95). "Products and services change with the demands of the market. Individual leaders come and go. The key is to create an organizational culture that ensures great leadership today *and* tomorrow."

In other words, you need a long-term fix, not a magic bullet or a trendy program *du jour* or a charismatic leader. You need a culture built on good, solid, time-tested leadership principles. Studer urges organizations to institute proven across-the-board behaviors that don't depend on particular individuals. His book reveals some tried and true "best practices"—also known as *evidence-based leadership*—that enable companies of all types to create results that last.

These practices are not complicated. They're simple, commonsense tactics that leaders can get their hands around and start doing right away. And you *don't* have to adopt every directive in his book to enjoy significant results. In fact, says Studer, implement these five "biggies" and you'll see dramatic changes by the end of 2008:

Get rid of low performers. Now. Let's say your employee Carol consistently gets "headaches" every other (non-payday) Friday, and spends more time chatting up coworkers than she does working. Others *will* notice—and they *will* be resentful. But worse than merely causing contention in the ranks, turning a blind eye to the "Carols" in your organization squelches profitability. Why? Because middle performers get pulled down to the low-performer level, while high performers either a) disengage or b) leave.

"Too many of us give low performers a pass," says Studer, whose remedy involves implementing a structured series of high-middle-low performer conversations. "It's easier *not* to confront low performers, and trust me, a leader can find a thousand other things to do instead. But until you move them either up or out, your company will never advance beyond short-term gains. The low performer is an anchor holding

everyone else back. Make this year the year you quit looking the other way."

Accentuate the positive. The next time you're having lunch in a restaurant, listen in on the conversations at nearby tables. Chances are, you'll hear people griping about their workloads, difficult clients, annoying co-workers, or the ridiculousness of corporate policy. Everyone does it, but if they realized how harmful it is to their company, perhaps they'd think twice. The solution, says Studer, is to hone the fine art of *managing up*.



New employee orientation. [Source: www2.slac.stanford.edu]

"Managing up means positioning your people, products, or company in a positive light," says Studer, who teaches clients how to hardwire the technique into their corporate leadership practices. "Managing up doesn't just happen; you have to *make* it happen in a systematic way. Help employees understand what can happen when negativity is allowed to breed—good people quit and customers leave—and they'll be more likely to stop doing it."

Make a real connection with employees—every day, with each employee. Studer is a big proponent of what he calls "rounding for outcomes." Like many of his tactics, this critical leader behavior reveals his health care industry roots. (Think of a doctor making her daily rounds to check on patients.) Rounding helps you communicate openly with your employees, allowing you to regularly find out what is going well and what isn't going well for them at the company. But remember, says Studer, it's not just empty "face time"—it's *rounding for outcomes*, which means the process has a serious purpose.

"In the business world, a CEO, VP, or department manager makes the rounds daily to check on the status of his employees," explains Studer. "Basically, you take an hour a day to touch base with employees, make a personal connection, recognize success, find out what's going well, and determine

what improvements can be made. Rounding is the heart and soul of building an emotional bank account with your employees, because it shows them, day in and day out, that you care."

Say thanks. In fact, put it in writing. Studer is a big advocate of sending thank you notes to employees who do an excellent job. But that doesn't mean just sending the occasional note when someone goes far above the call of duty. It means literally mandating a specific number of thank-you notes for leaders to send to the people they supervise. "Thank you notes don't just happen," says Studer. "If they aren't hardwired into an organization, they don't get written. And a thank-you note is just too powerful a tool not to use. People love receiving thank you notes. They cherish them."

The best thank you notes according to Studer are:

- » Specific, not general. A thank you note that focuses on something specific the recipient has done is far more effective than one that reads, "Hey, nice job!"
- » Handwritten, if possible. Most people would rather receive a three-sentence handwritten note than a two-page typed letter. It's more authentic and special.
- » Sent to the employee's home. When an employee receives a thank-you note at home, it feels more personal than one laid on her desk along with a stack of reports and memos.

Don't just recruit great employees. Rerecruit them. If you plan to hire in 2008, here's a relatively easy step you can take that will pay off in a big way. We all know employee turnover is expensive. But did you know that more than 25 percent of employees who leave positions do so in the first 90 days of employment? To retain a new team member, the leader needs to build a relationship. Studer Group has found that scheduling two one-on-one meetings, the first at 30 days and the second at 90 days, has an enormous impact on retention that directly turns into savings for your organization.

"If these meetings are handled successfully, new employee turnover is reduced by 66 percent," says Studer, who suggests using a structured list of questions to discover not only what's not going well, but also what *is* going well. "You can be certain that your new employee is comparing her first few weeks of work with your company to her last week at her previous job—which was filled with well wishes, tearful good-byes, and probably a going-away party. Clearly, your company will get the short end of an unfavorable comparison. These meetings will help you shore up an otherwise tenuous relationship."

Once you start implementing these tactics, results quickly follow. Your employees will see that you care about them, which boosts morale, which improves performance, which leads to happier customers, which leads to higher profits. Incidentally, the book also offers a "customer tactics" section, but Studer says creating satisfied employees is the first order of business.

"When things aren't going so well, a lot of leaders panic and start doing things that make employees *less* satisfied," he notes. "Don't make that mistake. Your leaders' job is to create happy, loyal, productive employees. They, in turn, will create happy, loyal, profitable customers. They are two sides of the same coin—and that coin is the currency that buys you results that last."

EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEY



Each year, *CE News*, a civil engineering trade publication with a circulation of 50,000, conducts a survey to measure employee satisfaction at small businesses. The respondents are the firms' employees, and their input is anonymous.

The survey questions cover a variety of topics, including company leadership and responsiveness, workplace fairness, quality of work, family atmosphere, company adherence to its mission statement, quality of software and hardware provided, quality of benefits, and career growth and opportunities to move up in the company.

The answers are compared to a benchmark number—the average response of the whole contestant pool which, in 2007 comprised 19,000 employees. Those numbers are then used to generate a ranking of all the firms participating in the survey.

In 2007, Affinis, a Kansas City-based consulting engineering firm was named by *CE News* "Best Civil Engineering Firm to Work For." The 35-person company was ranked no. 40 of top 50 firms nationwide and no. 16 of the top 20 small firms in the country.

Affinis is focused on building long-lasting relationships with its workers, clients, and among colleagues. "We work very hard to make Affinis a great place to work," said John Thomas, P.E., Vice President. "We strive for everyone to have a voice in how the company is run."

GeoWeb 2008 student contest

The first GeoWeb student contest will be held in July 2008, during GeoWeb meeting in Vancouver, BC, Canada, July 1-25. The theme of the conference is Infrastructure: Local to Global, and the objective of the student contest is to advance the development of the GeoWeb with either a theoretical solution or a piece of open source software. The contest is open to all full-time students attending an educational institution anywhere in the world. [www.geowebconference.org]

