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Change Lives, Not Software

by David Russell

As you consider your next workforce technology project, consider Sally's story. She is a single mom that works for your company. Every day she does her best to do a good job, yet she is not fully engaged in her work.

Her boss rarely interacts with her and it's typically negative. At performance review time Sally longs for feedback from her boss, yet the meeting starts out with her boss complaining that performance reviews are a waste of time. The boss makes that conclusion come true each year.

Unfortunately none of Sally's good work is validated, yet she carries the daily burden of trying to find solutions for unhappy customers. She goes home each night to her 3 young children. She loves them, but has little emotional energy left at the end of her workday to cook dinner, help with their homework and give them the love they desperately need. Life is a dead end for Sally because of her work environment.

So what's your workforce management project got to do with Sally and hundreds if not thousands of other Sally's at your company? Plenty, and here's why.

When you properly implement workforce management software, you can change Sally's world in addition to your company's bottom line. Sally's life is transformed as her boss leverages the software to manage Sally more consistently and she gains greater control of her destiny. Then her work has more meaning, Sally is engaged in her job and she can even become an outgoing evangelist for the company.

The Gallup Organization estimates only 25% of your workers are engaged, so Sally's story should be of interest to you. Yes, Sally is a fictional character but very real based on the hundreds of companies I have met with over my 30 years in business.

Consider software to change lives rather than just as new technology. Here are 7 quick tips from my *Success With People* system to help you successfully roll-out talent management software:

1. Systematic Power: A disciplined approach to implementing systems in your work environment maximizes efficiencies and effectiveness. In regards to a workforce management software initiative, take a systematic approach and keep it simple. Limit the number of objectives to no more than 3 and define them clearly. Understand your processes and hold to them, or improve the process and be consistent in managing according to the revised process.

2. Live It – Observe It – Improve It: LOI: At each step of the process use the software yourself in a real-life simulation to confirm it works. Observe others using it. Meet informally with people to solicit their feedback on the system. Improve how the technology is being used. Don't just plan to roll out each phase and then move onto the next agenda item.

Don't assume people the software works the way you expect it to work. You have to use it yourself at each stage to confirm it actually achieves your objectives. Set the example by using it yourself and have a limited number of others test it too in real-life scenarios.

3. Sanctuary: Implementing new software can often be a physically and emotionally draining. Make certain to take regular breaks during the day to *Rest* with healthy snack and walking to clear your mind. *Reflect* on the progress being made and ask yourself what could be done differently to improve efficiency or what person might offer a perspective that's being overlooked. Lastly, consider the *Risk* of failure beyond just meeting an implementation deadline. We all hate missing deadlines but sometimes the benefits of a brief project extension outweigh the risk of a poor implementation. Make certain you are achieving your long-term objectives.

4. Pass The Baton on Job Responsibilities: From the start of your workforce management initiative, make certain you are clearly delegating responsibilities between your employees and contractors. People can only be held accountable if they know what they are supposed to do. As much as possible have the team members define their roles and then fine-tune them to meet your requirements.

Let your people and contractors define the timeframe for implementation. Review the plan to make certain it is solid and realistic. I recommend the timeline your team and contractors submit drives the initiative, yet you should set a slightly later expectation confidentially with your boss. Delays happen and you want to give yourself margin for unexpected problems.

Then pass the baton and let your people run with the project. Stay in weekly if not daily contact with them, but let your people do their job. Build in rewards for them for exceptional work.

5. Listen More: Talent management is all about employee empowerment. As the project is going, listen carefully to both bad and good news so you can respond to your team's needs in a manner that keeps the program on track. As you approach the project and as challenges come up, encourage your employees to define how to solve problems, coaching them through the process and lending your knowledge / expertise when necessary.

6. Write Goals That Work: I once met with a manager who had been given 17 goals for the year. It was impossible. Don't overburden one or more people on your implementation team with too much responsibility. Make certain the project is shared equally and the workloads are realistic. Try to limit major objectives to 3 per person maximum. Write your goals in a simple, consistent manner. I write TARGET Goals. Learn how on our web site - www.SuccessWithPeople.com.

7. Coach – Do Not Play: Great leaders do not lead by assumption, they delegate so their people can prove they have learned well and can deliver results. Give people the information, tools and support they need and then coach them. You never see a championship professional sports team win without a coach, but also you never see the coach go on the field to play the game. Coach your people. Don't try to play the game for them.

If you have any questions, contact me.

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