

Improving the Business Acumen

In recent times much discussion has been centred on how to increase worker productivity and improve customer service. These are two problems which have continued to be cause for concern by employers. Arising out of these there seems to be a change in work culture. This is based on the fact there is a growing apathy amongst workers. It may not be easy to identify any single contributing factor to this development, but it can be argued that there are growing signs of a decline in the work ethic and the observance of workplace standards.

In looking for the underlying contributory factors to this trending problem, the view can be advanced that at the core of it could be a poor business acumen. Since management is expected to take the lead responsibility in the workplace, it is but appropriate to consider the extent to which it contributes to the problem. Is management leading as it is expected to do? The understanding is that management sets the tone for the enterprise /organization. Therefore the actions taken and decisions made will have a decisive impact on the outlook of workers, attitude to work, work ethic, productivity, performance, commitment and loyalty. The ability of management to effectively communicate with employees and members of its external public, will to all intents and purpose, go a long way in making the difference to the enterprise /organization realizing its goals and objectives.

It is the role of the employer / management to inspire and motivate. Where this is lacking, there is the distinct possibility that worker apathy will become more apparent. The case can well be made for a strong Human Resources Management Department with in enterprises and organizations. Employers and managers who exercise a master servant, dictatorial management approach, or who enjoy exploiting workers, will certainly in this day and age meet with bitter resentment from a more educated and enlightened workforce. Not even the so called most vulnerable workers are prepared to accept behaviour of this kind, and hence in many an instance there is a high turnover of staff.

The expert view that a major aspect of the business acumen is that of how employers and management find ways to keep their customers happy. Since workers are key to the interface with customers, it means that they

are expected to offer a high quality of customer service. It is to be expected that this would realize if the employees themselves are at the receiving end of good treatment from their employer and management. It can be reasoned that the actions and decisions of employers/ management as it relates to poor service and the disposition displayed by workers, can be a consequence of the failings of employers/ management. The unfortunate thing about this is that the innocent customer is at the receiving end of bad customer service. There are those businessmen who would attempt to bury their heads in the sand and not recognize that they are the cause of the down turn in their business operations, but instead attempt to lay the blame squarely at the feet of workers, whom they condemned for their poor work ethic and general indifference.

Trade unions are in turn the targets of the wrath of employers, who castigate them for defending workers' right, educating the workforce of its rights, pressing for improved conditions of service and the engagement and empowerment of workers. Trade unions have a vested interest in promoting a congenial work environment and therefore reflect a commitment to the improvement of the business and worker performance. An improvement business acumen that places workers at the core can redound to improve workplace relations, an enhanced work culture and greater level of worker productivity.

In working towards an improve business acumen, trade unions promote the need for greater attention to be place on the training and retraining of workers. This has to be a part of any plans of an enterprise or organization which is serious about its growth and development. There is a tendency to have training pitch at the lower level staff. A case can successfully be made that if an enterprise or organization is to seriously address its business acumen, then the training of its management personnel has to be one of its priorities. If the efficiency of the enterprise/organization is considered as paramount, then in-depth training of the management personnel, must be seen as one way of eliminating the square pegs in round holes; who actions and decision making more often than not, prove to be detrimental to realizing the objectives of the enterprise/organization.

With a focus on promoting investment as a means stimulating growth and development, it ought to be recognized that monies that are invested but

are not well managed, can derail the intentions to build strong and competitive enterprises and organizations. The stark reality is that the business acumen required today, speaks to prudent management, strong, decisive and well educated and versed leadership.