

Whether your business is product or service related, a sole proprietorship with a force of one or a multinational conglomerate with thousands of employees, productivity directly impacts your bottom line. Confusing activity with productivity is both a costly and exhausting mistake. Your methods and procedures for creating output are major factors in determining your level of productivity. The effectiveness of your methods and procedures directly influence your results. As your output is your direct means for revenue generation, it is easy to see the importance of continuous business process improvements.

Early in my 20+ year career I learned, the hard way of course, the importance of a committed workforce in any attempts toward process improvements. The answer to higher productivity begins with an investment in creating committed employees. This idea is difficult in today's business environment where company loyalty is an historic sentiment, but it can be done! Motivated, committed, and skilled people can often make things work in spite of less than perfect systems. These individuals are well worth the investment.

So, how do leaders and employees make this investment? What investments need to be made? What is the role of leaders? What is the role of employees? The optimum solution combines proven principles with a non-traditional approach. Here are six principles for a committed workforce:

1. **Establish the philosophy that personal development means business.** Put an active program in place to develop employee skills. This benefits both the employee and the organization through improved employee contributions. This investment should include developing skills in creativity, leadership, communication, decision making, management, customer service, and technical skills.
2. **Become a change organization.** Change is related to innovation, and innovation is about improved results. An innovative mind set and culture is one that encourages new ideas, positive attitudes, and learning. It can create a dynamic environment that stimulates growth. Organization's that embrace change respond positively to business challenges.
3. **Create ownership and involvement.** People simply perform better when they feel they have a direct vested interest in the outcome, from knowing that they make a direct contribution to the organization's success. This is a core principle of total quality. Including and involving employees in the solution design for business problems is a powerful way of accomplishing ownership.
4. **Learn to balance personal and work life.** In a recent survey, balancing the demands of personal and work lives was the number one issue, ahead of job security and salary. It is more than just a time issue. Mental, physical, social, family, financial/career, and spiritual/ethical elements of an individual's life will affect productivity. Conversely, an issue at work can affect the employee's personal life. The ability to balance both the employee's personal and professional life is a developable skill. The result is employees that are happier, more focused, and more productive when at work.
5. **Establish a set of higher values and live by them.** When company leaders consistently behave based on a purpose loftier than profits, a sense of company pride develops. Johnson & Johnson provides an excellent example of this as found in the first sentences of their credo from their website, "We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services. In meeting their needs everything we do must be of high quality". With a value based purpose everyone in the organization can make decisions consistent with the organization's purpose.
6. **Foster attitudes that serve the business and the individual.** Attitudes are habits of thought that influence behavior. Understanding that there is a direct link between the way we think and the way we behave can lead to a more pleasant and cooperative work environment. Attitudes can be improved, but it requires a conscientious effort.

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