



Improving Relationship Quality

By Mark D. Sauter, author, *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*

"It's a sign of insanity to keep doing the same things, yet expecting different results."

- Albert Einstein

Today, many organizations are struggling with the effects of a fractured workplace. Relationships, internally and externally, have become less loyal and more transactional. Emphasis has gradually shifted away from maximizing value to maximizing profits, and from interdependence and collective good toward independence and self-sufficiency.

Most people do not need to look too far to see the deterioration of relationships, whether in their personal or professional lives. So common in fact, many people accept it as normal. People are increasingly challenged with the social pressures and dynamics found at work. Conflicting agendas, challenging personalities, excessive demands and lack of focus drain the energy from today's workforce, insidiously eroding performance and morale. In order to deliver sustainable results, organizational leaders must step up and address this escalating crisis of employee apathy and disengagement. Monetary incentives do not guarantee an engaged or productive workforce. Employees require an intrinsic source of motivation, a sense of meaning, purpose and contribution from their work. Without it, employees tend to rely on extrinsic (e.g., compensation, status, and advancement) sources of motivation, which cost more to administer and the motivational impact is short lived.

For purposes here, however, it is also important to see the effects of relationship negligence at an even higher level; a level that reflects a deeper issue at play within many of today's businesses. While frequently overlooked, relationship quality, in and outside an organization, significantly affects bottom line performance.

For example, the U.S. auto industry is struggling to compete with Asian competitors. In some respects their inability to compete is based on quality and cost. And it is also a result of the quality of relationships they have maintained with employees, suppliers, dealers and end-consumers. U.S. auto companies, while attempting to protect their material interests, have embraced a more transactional approach to these relationships. When they had a captive audience, U.S. companies benefited economically, however, in the process they have eroded relationship trust and constrained the long-term viability of many of their so-called partners.

Asian companies, on the other hand, put high value on the quality, intimacy and heritage of these same relationships. They do not underemphasize the importance of these relationships nor do they treat them in a short-term disposable manner. This is not surprising when we consider that many Asian led companies are still influenced by ancient wisdom. For instance, Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (604-531 BC) taught that the inferior man accumulates wealth while the honorable man accumulates virtue – today, he would likely say that also applies to organizations.

American companies are quickly discovering the cost, quality and supply advantages the Asian companies have due to the strength of these historic and now global relationships. Interestingly, U.S. auto companies believe their Asian competitors have an unfair, even cultural advantage. In this case the Asian's do have an advantage but it is not necessarily a cultural one. It is a common-sense one. Yet, rather than stepping up to the relationship quality issues they have, U.S. companies instead seek political and economic restrictions. They are searching for short-term answers to compensate for long-term negligence.

In this example, Asian's do have a distinct advantage. It should serve as a wakeup call to the U.S. auto industry and possibly Western business practices in general. *Bringing Meaning into Monday™* offers a process that can help institutions address it.

Groups that develop a shared consciousness can perform tasks fluidly, efficiently, cooperatively and in coordination, with minimal communication. An intuitive connection or empathy gives people the ability to anticipate the actions, thoughts, or words of others in the group; as a result, teammates work as a unit rather than as an aggregate of individuals.

- Duane Elgin, Author
Promise Ahead

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