Creating Sustainable Performance - Article Summary

The recent Harvard Business Review article, “Creating Sustainable Performance” by Gretchen Spreitzer and Christine Porath, asserts there is a difference between happy employees and thriving employees, or as we refer to them at PHH, engaged employees.

The benefit of thriving employees is simple: Happy employees produce more than unhappy employees over long term. Happy employees show up to work, are less likely to quit and go above and beyond. Thriving itself is a step above and beyond mere contentment. Thriving employees are defined as employees who are engaged in creating the future, have an edge, are highly energized and of course, outperforming counterparts, in some cases up to 16%. Research shows that thriving employees show 125% less burnout, are 32% more committed and 46% more satisfied with their jobs.

There are two hallmarks of thriving employees: vitality and learning. Vitality is the sense of being alive passionate and excited. Learning is the growth that comes from gaining new knowledge and skills. Often times you will find these hallmarks in employees who are considered high performers.

There are four things a manager can do to create an environment where vitality and learning are maximized:

1. **Provide decision making discretion**
   Providing decision making discretion to employees empowers them and gives them a greater sense of control, more voice in the process and more opportunities for learning.

   Managers can strike this balance by providing decision making discretion by asking for employee input into decisions that affect the team, and showing trust in the decisions employees have made, and allowing employees to infuse creativity into the details of their work (the look of a presentation, the delivery style of instructions, etc.).

   The challenge for managers is to avoid cutting back empowerment when people make mistakes. Allowing employees the ability to make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or reprisal allows them the freedom to make the correct decision on the next occasion which sustains engagement long term.

2. **Share information**
   Sharing information contributes to employees’ understanding of how their work fits with the organization’s mission and strategy, which in turn, gives employees a greater sense of individual value.

   Doing your job in an information vacuum is tedious and uninspiring. Managers can try sharing information by: being transparent on non confidential matters such as team productivity numbers and how they support the vision of the department; daily team huddles to share goals, issues and
successes; and short term incentives to get employees looking at the information being shared and to place it in the context of long term solutions.

3. **Minimize incivility**
   The cost of incivility is enormous, and something employees on every level can relate to, yet it is rarely discussed. Christine Pearson, a professor at Thunderbird School of Global Management, found that half of employees who had experienced uncivil behavior at work **intentionally** decreased their work efforts. A third deliberately decreased the quality of their work and two-thirds spent a large amount of time avoiding the offender.

   Leaders set the tone for civility. If a leader treats employees and peers in a civilized, respectful fashion, this will be culture of the team. Conversely, leaders condone incivility by tolerating it. Leaders must “nip it in the bud” by addressing offenders in private and making their expectations of behavior and interaction clear to everyone on the team.

4. **Performance Feedback**
   Feedback creates opportunities for learning and energy that is critical to a culture of thriving employees. Managers can provide feedback both publicly and privately.

   Public feedback can be a powerful motivator when leaders employ data based performance information such as dashboards. People are hardwired to respond to metrics and goals and will compete against their own numbers.

   Private feedback can be provided by evaluating results that employ open ended summaries such as performance discussions and one on one weekly meetings.

   Each mechanism listed does not require an extraordinary effort, but they do require management investment in each employee to create the conditions in which they can thrive. All four are required for the formula to create an environment that supports employee engagement.

   Sustainable performance and prolonged employee engagement can be challenging without the right tools in place. To maximize employee engagement, leaders must be committed to developing and sustaining an environment that supports vitality and learning.