

## Building a Creative, Exciting Company Where Every Employee Strives to Produce Exceptional Results

This is what every CEO and manager wants -- but as we all know, it is not easy to attain. This is because the answer, what you need to do, is counter-intuitive. You get a creative and effective workforce by creating an environment where employees have the freedom to make the best decisions and take the best actions. This freedom only comes with the right infrastructure and the right controls. This is the paradox. Creativity depends on freedom and freedom depends on control. Without controls, you do not get freedom; you get chaos.

Some managers will try to promote creativity by becoming more involved in day-to-day decisions and activities. This never works. The solution is to put the right controls and guidance in place that will allow your employees to effectively do their best and be most effective. How do you do this? By creating a work environment that emphasizes the following seven characteristics.

**Focus** – Employees need to know what they can and cannot do. They need to know the limits or parameters they must stay within when they are doing their job and looking at ways to make process and other improvements. You can accomplish part of this by having a clear mission statement for your department or team, current job descriptions and a well understood agreement on when people can make decisions independently and when approvals or consultations are required.

You also want to focus them on accomplishing things within your team's responsibility. Your employees have the best understanding of what is working and what needs improvement in their own team because they deal with these details every day. Focusing them on being most effective when they do their job and then making improvements to have even better results in the future will yield continual improvements. Next, you want them to have a clear picture of where they are going, a vision of the future.

**Vision** – Each team and department should have a vision statement (to compliment its mission statement) that motivates every employee to produce extraordinary results. It should be exciting and paint a picture of what you want the team to look like in an ideal world. The team then uses this vision in their meetings where they review their results and decide what changes they need to make. Changes that help fulfill the team's vision are pursued. Those that do not are discarded.

Having a clear vision of where the team is going helps every employee stay on the path that will make the team most successful. It also helps raise the team's overall performance since employees will no longer be satisfied with just doing a good job. They will want to attain exceptional results. But, how will you know if you are making improvements and building towards this ideal that is your team's vision of the future? To do this, you need concrete, balanced goals and metrics.

**Goals and Metrics** – The right goals and metrics define what employees need to do and why their jobs are important to their team and company. Without these goals, they will not know how well they are doing or if they need to improve. They also need weekly and monthly feedback on their results -- a scorecard, on how well they are doing. Without these goals and feedback, it is like bowling through a curtain. You throw the ball, hear some noise but do not know which pins fell down and which are still standing. You can't effectively take the next step, make appropriate adjustments or reinforce what is working well. You cannot excel. Most importantly, you cannot be accountable for your results . . . and accountability is critical for the team's success.

**Accountability** – Each employee must be accountable for the results he or she individually attains. Each employee is also accountable for what his or her team accomplishes or fails to accomplish. This creates an environment where employees first strive to do their job well and exceed their individual goals. Then they help their teammates excel. Finally, they work on projects to improve how their team operates. The result is long-term and consistent excellence. To be most effective, all three accountabilities must be included in each employee's performance evaluation and compensation adjustment. To make this work well there is another element that must be present; everyone on your team must have free and open access to necessary information.

**Transparency** – One of the lessons business has "relearned" from the current financial crisis is that keeping secrets and making it difficult for people to understand how things work or what is happening breeds problems. It is always better to have free and open communication. Beware of the department or person that says "This is too complicated for you to understand," or "You don't need to understand this to do your job."

The best way to promote creativity and get the best results and improvements is to have an environment where employees can ask any question and get truthful, complete answers. This means full communication on everything, from business results to how systems and processes work. When employees are working on an improved way of doing something, they must be able to follow an idea wherever it leads them. The only exception is when personal information is involved.

**Opportunity and Assistance** – The best way to create and maintain the most effective team environment is to have weekly meetings to discuss the team's results, what is working well, what needs improvement and the progress of change projects. This refocuses everyone weekly on the team's business results and reinvigorates everyone on the need for improvements. It gives everyone a chance to participate, show what he or she has done and keeps everyone's focus on business results. These meetings usually last about an hour and are a great investment in the future.

Besides these creative meetings, managers need to ensure that employees have the training and other assistance to both do their jobs well and effectively manage improvement projects. Employees are usually most effective on projects involving work done within the team so this is where they should start. As they gain experience and their efforts become more complex, they will work on efforts involving other teams and departments.

**Recognition** – This is where most companies fail, probably because they do not believe they will be successful in getting truly great results. Specifically, they do not create an incentive plan that effectively motivates or rewards employees for outstanding results. The result is that the effort fails because employees do not think the extra work is worth the little reward they might get. The best way to avoid this fatal error is to get outside, professional help – not from a human resources firm but from a consulting firm that specializes in getting outstanding results.

As you read this letter, I am sure you found many things that your department or company is currently doing. I am also sure that you found some that you are either not doing, some that you are doing poorly or some you are only partially doing. To attain the goals we are talking about, you need to do all of these and do them well . . . and there are more things that are beneficial that we did not mention.

We can help you by reviewing what you are doing and suggesting improvements. We have been helping insurance companies get outstanding results for over 15 years. Please visit our website at [McDonaldConsultingGroup.com](http://McDonaldConsultingGroup.com), where you will find further explanations of these ideas (and other exciting ideas) in our Concepts and Ideas section.