

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE – CAN IT HELP IN RECESSION?

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We've been here before – in recession, fighting to survive, hoping to be one of the businesses that can look back and say 'we made it'. It takes adaptability, determination and will, plus engaged employees with skin in the game. This is a team challenge – no one can do it alone. People are key to success:

- Who knows the detail of your business or team?
- Who is talking to your customers on a daily basis?
- Who can spot opportunity because they are there on the front line?

Your people understand first hand what eats time; they know who is best at impressing the customer; they choose whether to give colleagues what they need or make them wait. In short, they hold the key to business success.

Yet the temptation for leaders and managers to hold onto control is huge – when risk is involved, doing it yourself can seem like the only sensible option. You're desperate to get it right, so the business can keep going and your people can keep their jobs. Laudable intentions, but they can make the competition look increasingly attractive to your high performers.

Talented people need challenge..... and money won't fill the gap

Survival v Recovery

Control may seem like the only way forward, but the limitations it brings to yourself, your people and the business are not really an option. Your people can give the discretionary effort required for survival plus the commitment and excitement you need to thrive once the markets finally turn. So your ability to use them well now *and* hold them for the future is the key.

Talented people need challenge. Boredom is an anathema – they don't have time to waste and money won't fill the gap. A career is beckoning and they want to know that they're on track for the next project or next promotion. And if you don't give it to them, no problem, they'll go elsewhere – even in recession.

And your stable achievers are equally important - you need them firing on all cylinders. They are loyal and committed – it's in their nature – so let them help, listen to



their ideas and support them in the day to day delivery that they do so well. Get them working well and you will gain peace of mind plus time and energy to focus on the future.

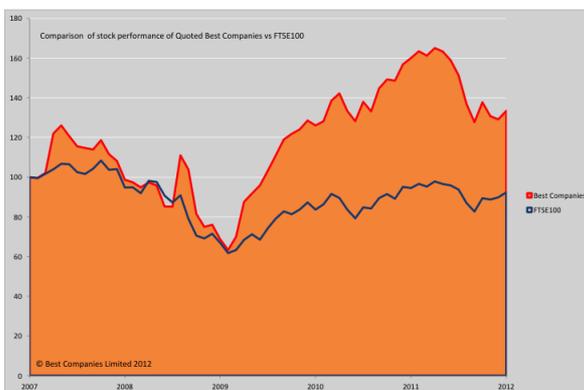
Working with your people at all levels in a constructive way adds real benefit. They say a problem shared is a problem halved and never more so than in these unknown waters. The challenge is too big for one person to manage alone. We have to work together in teams, pooling all our knowledge, skill and talent for the best outcome.

To find out more about the different achievers in your team, section or business, read *The Psychology of Success*: <http://www.greatcompaniesconsulting.com/Books-The-Psychology-of-Success.html>

How Employer of Choice will help

Employer of choice businesses.... are outperforming the FTSE 100 – even in recession.

The concept of **Employer of Choice** gives you a clear path to success at all levels. Take a look at the graph below comparing the quoted companies on the Best Companies list set against the FTSE 100. They are outperforming consistently and now, in these years of recession, even better than previously. And this isn't only the UK. In every country where Great Company Culture is identified, it is clear the best companies are beating their competitors. Why wouldn't you want this for your business?



- It makes sense for the health of the business and improves your bottom line.
- High performers will seek you out as a great place to develop their careers.
- Employees will choose to stay, reducing recruitment cost and providing a consistent service to your customer

Working with a team/company of committed people takes the weight of your shoulders and lets you do the job you were employed for.

A no brainer really! Clearly this is both urgent *and* important, so focus on the key factors that will support the business and promote the bottom line.

Employer of Choice Attitudes and Behaviours

From our research into great culture, outlined in the book *Becoming an Employer of Choice* http://www.amazon.co.uk/Becoming-Employer-Choice-Organization-People/dp/1843980576/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpt_3, we have worked out the attitudes and behaviours needed to create a positive workplace. From this we know what it takes to build and/or turn a culture round. Outlined here are some first thoughts for you to consider:

1. Who needs to be involved?
2. Quick wins – actions you can take today.
3. Long-term attitudes to include in your own thinking and behaviour.

1. Who needs to be involved?

It is always easier when senior leaders are enthused and bought in to the benefits of being an Employer of Choice. But if you don't have this in your workplace, don't lose heart - leaders and managers can pick up the baton regardless. A great culture is created by everyone working together, so whatever your role, get going and enjoy the change. Your senior leaders will notice the changes and become interested as the success rolls in.

A great culture is created by everyone working together

Setting the foundation

Your business already has a culture – it is created automatically as each person looks for and acts on clues about 'the ways we work round here'. The big question is whether the culture serves the business and helps it move forward or whether it holds the company back.

The culture you have in your business is driven by the behaviour of leaders and managers. Think back to your early managers. My guess is that you took their behaviour as a guide to the 'right' way to do things. Everyone does this – we look for pointers and adjust so that we fit in.

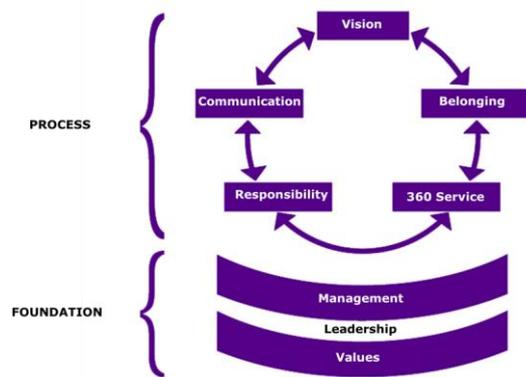
To help identify the areas that need attention in the prevailing culture of an organisation, we created the **Great Companies Model**, which outlines the different factors that lead to a great place to work. There are two parts to the model – the Foundation and the Process. Getting the Foundation right means the Process will be easier to work with and people will know exactly where they stand.

Both leaders and managers are fundamental to the foundation of a Great Culture:

- They actively live the agreed values, setting a clear role model for people around them, so that the required behaviours become deeply embedded in the day to day working culture.
- They understand that people are a central part of their job and give time, effort and real commitment to people management.

There is real business benefit to this level of people focus. Changes are more easily integrated and the business can adapt quickly to market forces – an ability that is golden in this day and age.

While this adds another layer of complexity to the work of leading and managing, it also means that the job will be considerably more satisfying, results will be stronger and leadership careers will be made.



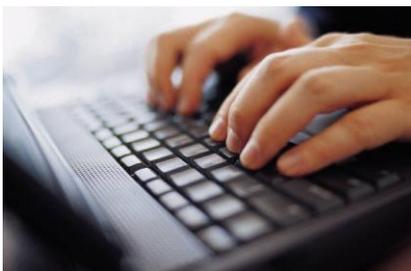
Great Companies Model

So if you are up for shifting the culture in your business, section or team:

2. Start with quick wins

Look for small changes that will make an impact on the people around you. Some possibilities might be:

1. Sit alongside someone in a part of the business you don't know so well in order to understand the work they do. Be interested, ask open questions to explore what life is like for them, find out what would make life better and consider how the two areas of the business might work together more effectively.



2. Look for something to celebrate. Make sure it's real and show your appreciation for work done well, to time, or against the odds. It doesn't need to be a big deal – a thank you card left on the keyboard, doughnuts at coffee time, recognition in your team meeting....

3. Talk with your people about the team culture – what works, what interferes with delivery, what could be done better and what they enjoy. Explore ideas for improvement together and be ready to take action on anything that is possible, sharing responsibility for making this happen.

These are just a few thoughts. You will probably have other great ideas for how you can start changing perceptions in your part of the business. If not, ask people what would make an immediate difference to their day. Asking, in its own right, will be a

quick win as long as you take action on suggestions made - you will set a very different tone to the team or workplace.

If you would like help to explore new ways of engaging your people, read *Inspirational Manager* http://www.amazon.co.uk/Inspirational-Manager-Relationships-Deliver-Results/dp/0273745689/ref=sr_1_sc_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1348477565&sr=1-1-spell or consider taking part in our Inspirational Manager Development programme.

Employer of Choice has to sit firmly in the business or it will never work

3. Follow up with long term activities

Some elements of **Employer of Choice** require long term commitment – culture is like turning a large oil tanker – it takes a long time! A good first step is to find out where you are right now – what is working really well and what could be improved. You have a number of options:

- You can undertake an employee engagement survey that will provide feedback right across the board. There are a number of business that provide this service.
- You can talk yourself to people who will be honest about their working experience. Every workplace has someone who is in touch with how people are feeling – in the old days, it used to be the tea lady – find out who these people are in your area of influence and ask for honest feedback.
- **For the fastest route** use the **Rapid Diagnostic Process (RDP)** designed by GCC to gather feedback against the Great Companies Model and deliver findings at the end of the day with ideas for action.
<http://www.greatcompaniesconsulting.com/Services-Employer-of-Choice.html>

Once you have a clear steer on what is already positive, what can be built on and what needs to change, make a plan for your next steps. If this is a whole company initiative, then managers, leaders and HR can work together to set a plan in motion. If you are on a lone mission at the outset, then agree next steps with your people and create a small haven of great culture in your team or section.



NB: HR Professionals – building Employer of Choice culture is not your job! It may well be handed to you, but please say ‘No’ - you can’t do this on your own. You will be teacher, catalyst and support, but Employer of Choice has to sit firmly in the business or it will never work.

If you need help or new ideas for developing a plan of action for Employer of Choice, look at our **HR Workout** that delivers a clear and focused OD Plan for the company.
<http://www.greatcompaniesconsulting.com/Services-Employer-of-Choice.html>

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR FIRST LONG TERM STEPS.

While experimenting with quick wins, it is also important to consider the long term attitudes and changes that need to be made. Some of the first actions to consider are:

a. Invite your people to join you in creating a Great Workplace.

Let your people know just how much they matter to the business. Whether you are a CEO or a front line team leader, start involving others today and they will respond to you.

- Talk as openly as you can about the business reality and your plans for positive action. Make sure they can ask questions – either face to face or via email – and always give a straight answer, even if it's 'I don't know' or 'I'm not able to explain at this point, but as soon as I can, I will.'
- Work with your team to highlight areas for concern – business, client and engagement - and brainstorm new ideas. Where you see problems with suggestions take care not to rubbish them – instead, talk together about the pro's and con's, so people begin to understand where the opportunities really lie.
- Encourage interaction across teams and sectors to increase creativity. Give mixed groups relevant and real activities that will bring them together and add value. Let your people be your 'think tank'.

Don't worry if you are the only manager/leader interested in this level of engagement. Do it for yourself and your people and others will soon notice and come asking questions!

For ideas of how to build Great Company Leadership in your business, take a look at our Great Leader Development Process:

<http://www.greatcompaniesconsulting.com/Services-Great-Company-Leadership.html>

When people love coming to work, they... do a better job.

b. Give away responsibility.

Identify the strong performers – whether high flyers or day to day deliverers – and give them as much responsibility as you can. This does require you to delegate, which is demanding in tough times, but it will release you to do the job you're actually being paid for.

- Take time to clarify your future leaders, potential managers, experts and day to day stable achievers. This will show you who can take on more responsibility and the people in real need of a challenge i.e: those who can

help you deliver great results *and* those who will walk if they become bored, whatever state the market is in.

- Allocate responsibility according to both present role and future potential. This will help you stretch your high performers and high potentials in a way that is appropriate for appetite and ability.
- Give regular support – agree how and when you will provide support and stick to it. *These meetings need to be a three line whip!* This will demonstrate your faith in their ability and potential and help them improve and grow.
- **Always** listen to their concerns and good ideas. They are the ones doing the job, so pay attention to what they say and take action when you can.

Work this way with people and they will love being part of your team, section or company. And when people love coming to work, they will automatically do a better job. This is the real magic of Employer of Choice!

For more information about Inspirational Managers and how they make the very best of their people read *Inspirational Manager* and take a look at our Inspirational Manager Development programme

<http://www.greatcompaniesconsulting.com/Services-Inspirational-Manager.html>

c. Make coaching a default style



Tell people what to do and they will be obedient, delivering exactly what you've asked for and no more. Coach them to discover the best way forward, the pro's and con's of an idea, plus business need and they learn how to think. Then they will do what you ask for and much more:

- Get clear in your mind the situations where you really do need to give a clear instruction and information. Always do this when you need to.
- Identify the people in your team who would benefit from coaching to help them develop their thinking processes and their potential. Set aside time to do this with them and make it a non-negotiable, high priority meeting.
- Don't limit your coaching to a specific session or time. Let it be your default style – always begin with an open question to make sure you understand the real issue. And if lack of time tempts you in to 'tell', suggest a time when you can talk in more depth.

Coaching is the first port of call for Inspirational Managers, because they enjoy seeing talented people progress. They also know that they can't deliver well and progress themselves unless they have good people working for them. This is why they have great teams, deliver exceptional results and build talent. It's a salutatory thought – if you don't have excellent people working for you, there is no space or opportunity to develop your own career.

If you are keen to develop a coaching culture, take a look at the Academy of Executive Coaching and the programmes they have to offer.
<http://www.aoec.com/Organisations/Training/ExecutiveCoachingCertificateforManagersandLeaders>

Summary

During 16 years of working in business, I've visited many different organisations – some fantastic, some still in the throws of change and some that are just realising life could be different – and a lot better! It's a wonderful job – seeing people change and hearing about the benefits on all levels.

We love our manager – and we'll do anything to have them be successful.

When doing research for the book, *Inspirational Manager*, I met many direct reports and teams who told me that they loved their manager - not something I ever expected to hear in a business setting! Yet I could also see that these people were working really hard to help their manager and the team be successful – which is business gold, day in, day out.

Taking all these factors into account, **Employer of Choice** is the perfect way to manage in a recession, especially this one. Change is happening so fast now that it is beyond the ability of one person to manage it. It must become the norm for leaders and managers in organisations to share ideas, take responsibility and build strong teams. It is already the norm in Employer of Choice, so the benefits of focusing on culture, involving people and developing talent are well documented and definitely worth paying attention to.

So join the journey towards a great workplace and make sure your people:

- love their work
- feel valued and respected
- are aligned in the same direction,

Only then will your business gain longevity, thrive in the short and long term *and* be ready to take up the opportunities that will certainly abound once the upturn finally arrives.



For more information about Employer of Choice and its Leadership and Management Development, contact Judith on Judith@greatcompaniesconsulting.com