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*Paying it Forward
Leading with Purpose
with Chief Randy R. Bruegman, (Ret)*

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Don't Forget Your Most Important Investment: Your People

You probably have heard a similar phrase to this: that your people are your best asset. Let's look at this through a different lens; I think your people are your most important resource and your organization's best investment.

Your people can impact the public perception of your organization, your effectiveness, your bottom line, and the perception of the brand you project for your service or product. Just think of a bad experience that you have had with an employee of a business you shop with or with whom you do business. You may write off the first bad experience, but if you have a second, does that change your perception and cause you to look elsewhere for services or products? For most people, it does. Your people are the face of your company -- your brand ambassadors -- and every interaction they have with your customers makes an impression and a statement about your

organization. Your employees are the human capital of your operation, and they provide the best opportunity for long-term value creation, whether that is in company profits, brand recognition, customer satisfaction or customer service. When you invest in your employees, you are also investing in the future of your organization, and that is more important today than ever before.

Post-pandemic, an estimated 50% of workers have considered making changes to their work organization that will create better alignment with their core-values, such as investing in employee development and engaging their workforce in their decision process. So, if you are building your organization to be successful in the 21st century, increasing your investment in your employees will help to create long-term sustainability for your organization. That investment will result in building your bench strength, attracting talent, reducing turnover, motivating employees, improving productivity, creating organization loyalty, and building a reputation of an organization that cares about and invests in its employees. That alone will create a



self-perpetuating talent pool for your future. From a leadership perspective, if you make the commitment to invest in your people, you are building opportunity for your people's professional development, training, mentoring, and acquisition of new skills. The best part: you are building a culture that engages and empowers the workforce, and

that is the type of organization that people want to work in and do business with.

So, what does it take to start investing in your organization's people and creating a difference? You may be surprised to hear that, sometimes, it doesn't take much at all.

A Little Thing to You May be a Big Thing to Your Employees

It is not uncommon that, as people move up in their organizations and take on new leadership roles, they often forget how the decisions they make will impact the people that work for them. It's easy to do. You get focused on your next career step, become inundated with more complex problems to solve, and are faced with accomplishing those tasks in a shortened time frame. In the pressure to get things done, and having to maneuver through the political and bureaucratic systems found in most organizations, it is easy to overlook your most important resource: your people.

In your leadership role, you often make multiple decisions a day, and it is very easy to overlook, often without giving it a second thought, how the decisions you make will impact your employees or the team that you are assigned to lead. I must confess that I have placed myself in this dilemma several times by not taking the time to ask my

employees for their insight and opinions before making a decision. A classic example of the “law of unintended consequences” is when the results of a decision or action taken has results that were not part of the leader or manager's purpose.



But it is not only the decision you make; it is how you interact and engage with your employees on a daily basis that sets the stage for creating a powerful relationship. Creating a supportive relationships will fuel your employees' motivation, impact your bottom line, and help you create a culture that will attract talent to your organization. As a leader, one of your biggest responsibilities is to inspire people to do their best work so that they can prepare to take their next career step. A place to start is by connecting with each one of them.



A New Model of Work

One of the outcomes of the pandemic experience has been a shift of employees expectations. As we have emerged from the pandemic, many employees who worked from home or were laid off have reset what they want from their work lives.

It has been said that we experienced at least a decade of technology use and changes during the pandemic, but the same could be said in regard to the changes in employer/employee relationships. Employees are being much more selective in choosing who they work for, and are looking for an organization that aligns with their own values; a company in which the corporate culture appreciates its team members.

I believe that is why many companies, organizations, and in some cases, professions, are experiencing recruiting problems today. So many organizations are still leading and managing in pre-pandemic mode, recruiting and attracting employees the same way they did prior to the pandemic. They continue to follow this approach for

for recruitment while the employment world around them has changed, leaving them struggling to attract talent to their organizations. In the profession that I retired from, the fire and emergency services, many departments are struggling not only to recruit, but to retain employees long-term. That is a monumental shift from just five years ago, when it was not uncommon for many departments to have a 100 applications for each vacant position.

An additional shift that is occurring is the movement of people making career changes. Since the pandemic, millions of people have begun to quit their jobs, rethinking their work-life balance. The pandemic forced people to take stock of their lives and provided them an opportunity to reimagine what it could be. As a result, we have seen what is termed the “Great Resignation,” also known as the “Great Reshuffle.” According to Pew Research Center, approx. one in five workers (22% to be exact) say they are very or somewhat likely to look for a new job in the next six months. A PwC survey taken in 2021 indicated that, for employees who were looking for new opportunities, the key

incentives were schedule flexibility, expanded benefits, and compensation.

Another critical factor is the emergence of the next generation of workers -- Gen Z -- who will soon make up roughly a third of the workforce. They will pave the way for the changes that will come in the post-pandemic workforce. Each generation brings certain values, traits, and expectations to the workforce based upon their experiences, which will drive what they prioritize as important in their lives and in the workplace. Gen Z has experienced some significant events and factors that have shaped their outlook and that now drive their needs as they enter the workforce.

Events/Factors That Have Shaped Gen Z

9/11	Great Recession
Terrorism/War in Iraq	Election of Barack Obama
Gun Violence	Corporate Social Responsibility
Colombia Disaster	George Floyd Incident
Hurricane Katrina	COVID-19 Pandemic
Tech Developments	Push for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Smartphones	2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections
Text Messaging	
Social Networking	

Gen Z may bring a radically different attitude to the workplace based upon the significant events they have witnessed and have lived through. As the number of “Zoomers” entering the workforce increases, they will continue to influence workforce changes and will gravitate towards safe working environments that prioritize mental health. They will look for a livable pay with associated benefits, flexibility, and trust in how they work, as they have entrepreneurial mindsets and are very tech-savvy. Diversity, inclusiveness, sustainability, corporate responsibility, and social justice resonate with Gen Z, and they will seek to work in organizations that incorporate these attributes in their corporate culture.

As their numbers increase in the workforce, so will their influence on what the new model of work will look like. The pandemic didn't just change the way many organizations are doing business, it has also changed the workforce itself. Workers' needs have become more complex, and their priorities much more nuanced, which will require organizations to adapt and evolve if they hope to attract and retain quality employees now and in the future.



Chief B's Key Leadership Takeaways

Having the honor of speaking to great leaders in their profession in **The Leadership Crucible Podcast**, we make notes on the key leadership takeaways that are discussed. Will share those with you in hopes that it help you to reflect on your own leadership style, but also to provide some potential talking points that you can discuss with your team. Doing so is a great way to understand your teams, gain perspective on topics, helps you to gain a deeper understanding of how your individual team members think. It is an excellent way to build you team.

- ✓ If you think you're too big for the small jobs, maybe you're actually too small for the big job.
- ✓ It takes little effort to show that you care about the people you work with, but when you do, it will resonate in a significant way.
- ✓ Organizational culture is critical to attract and retain talent. Employees want a positive and engaging culture.
- ✓ A strong sense of connection to company culture and to colleagues can drive home a sense of purpose and collaboration across an organization.
- ✓ Leaders in an organization must be committed to making it a great place to work, otherwise it won't be.
- ✓ Effective organizational leaders value people as their most important resource and invest in them, recognizing that it is foundational to building their culture.
- ✓ Changes in workforce expectations, needs, and opportunities because of the pandemic mean employers have to change the way they approach recruitment. They need to think about the best way to attract and retain their employees in order to grow and support their businesses.
- ✓ When employees trust that you care about their work experience, they'll more freely share their insights, leading to better plans for change.
- ✓ *"Treat employees like they make a difference, and they will."*
-- Jim Goodnight

Bonus Leadership Takeaways: Insight from Jack Rives

Jack had a thirty-three-year career in the United States Air Force as a military attorney and Judge Advocate. He served as a Judge Advocate General of the United States Air Force, the senior US Air Force attorney, and he was the first military attorney to attain the three star rank of Lieutenant General. Jack is also a former Executive Director of the American Bar Association. Here's some of what he had to say in my interview with him:

When I was in the Pentagon, one of my jobs was working with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. When I was first assigned to that job, General Colin Powell was the chairman. One night I was working especially late, into the early morning hours. When I came into the Pentagon, I was talking to the guard. We were talking about some of the people who tended to “blow by him” as though he wasn't even there. Obviously, that was not being respectful. I think it's important to know the names of all the people who are working as part of your team. I know the names at the American Bar Association and both of our main offices, including our janitors and the people who do all the support service work. They support professionals who are trying to do their best. It is important that we show appreciation by knowing a name or asking about their family.

When I was talking to the guard at the Pentagon, he was commiserating with me about people

who were less than respectful. “But then there are people like General Powell,” who was then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff. “General Powell knows my name; he knows my wife's name, he knows I have children and grandchildren.” He said that sometimes when he walks in the building he can little more than nod his head and make eye contact. “Other times he would stop and call me by name, and ask about my wife by name, and ask about the grandchildren. You know, it does not take a lot to show that you care, and when you do show that you care, that, of course, can resonate in a very significant way.”

When you take the time to show a real interest in the people that you work with, no matter what their position in life, it shows that you care about them not just as an employee, but as a person. That brings a value proposition to you and your organization by building a culture that is relationship-based, placing value on everyone, no matter what their title. When you can do that as a leader, you will have an organization that will be very successful *and* a great place to work.

Jack Rives





Readers are Leaders

I believe that, to be a good leader, one must be on a continuous quest to gain more knowledge. The leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. John Coleman's article in the Harvard Business Review, "For Those Who Want To Lead, Read," highlights that the leadership benefits of reading are wide-ranging. Evidence suggests that reading can improve intelligence and lead to innovation and insight, and, for example, some studies have shown that reading makes you smarter through "a larger vocabulary and more world knowledge in addition to the abstract reasoning skills."

Reading has many benefits, but it is underappreciated as an essential component of leadership development. To that end, we'll provide a few suggested titles for you to consider reading.

The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups

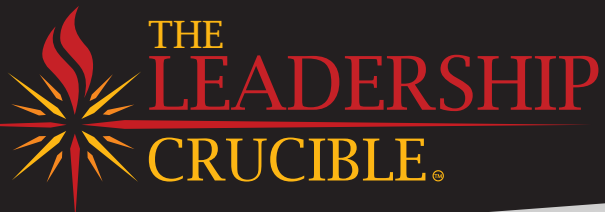
by Daniel Coyle

Humanocracy: Creating Organizations as Amazing as the People Inside Them

by Gary Hamel and Michele Zanini

Profit at the Bottom of the Ladder: Creating Value by Investing in Your Workforce

by Jody Heyman



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