Reversing Negativity

Every company needs people who play devil's advocate and push decision makers to consider all aspects of a situation prior to making a decision that can have long term impact on a company's performance. True too is the idea that no leader should want "yes men" around him/her because it blocks debate and inhibits creative thinking. Yet, while dissent is desirous, the presence of a constantly and continuous voice of opposition can be problematic, especially if the warnings are always cast regard why something can't be done, as opposed to why it shouldn't be done. The raising of challenges without the suggestion of solutions can lead to a decline in the influence of the traditionally cautious. For while management may take kindly to reasonable debate as to why something is a bad idea, it will from upon obstacles being put in the way of executing good ideas.

Sometimes a negative groundswell occurs inside a company because performance has been down, or people have been fired, or some other setback affects moral. The danger of negativity is that it can become an unstoppable force that eats away at morale and diminishes performance. In instances where employee motivation is key (which is just about every possible instance), the successful countering of a wave of negative feelings is essential for company performance, and perhaps even survival.

Being the eternal optimists that we are, Tudog believes that every situation is redeemable and offers here 9 suggestions for transforming negativity into a positive thing:

1. **Be a Good Role Model** – let's face it, when a captain yells abandon ship, everyone starts jumping overboard. You, as management, need to keep in mind that your employees are always looking toward you (and at you) for signs of where the company is, and where it's heading. You need to make sure that you are always putting your "happy face" on and that you are not giving a sense that insurmountable trouble has befallen the company. You can point out weaknesses, but make sure they always come together with how they can be strengthened.

2. **Nip it at the Bud** – closing your eyes and pretending something doesn't exist works well for the monsters under your bed. In most real life situations however there is a need to confront problems as they arise, and the faster they are addressed, the better. The same applies for negativity in the workplace. Once you sense that there is a growing discontent or that there is a sense of despair, act decisively to communicate both the true state of affairs and how the problems causing the worry will be resolved. Make certain to acknowledge that people are feeling negative, and without discounting or dismissing their feelings (or somehow making them seem illegitimate) demonstrate how they are unnecessary because the issues driving the feelings can and will be settled.

3. **Look on the Bright Side** – every company has small victories every now and then and yet sometimes we forget to acknowledge them. This leaves us open to the possibility of focusing on negative events. We need to make sure that we spot and recognize the silver lining in every situation. This does not mean you have to gloss over the problems – quite the opposite. By showing both the positive and the negative you are giving your team the motivation and reinforcement they need to put forth the effort and overcome the negative.

4. **Take the Bitter with the Sweet** – you cannot be a leader if all you do is criticize and point out errors. There is always some areas where an employee needs improvement and it is okay to push them to excellence. But at the same time you have to be certain that you are acknowledging and rewarding the positive elements of performance. Make sure you praise when praise is due. And most importantly, make sure you separate out the praise from the criticism. You dilute the praise when you criticize alongside it.

5. **Don't Get Caught Up** – sometimes negative sentiments build up over time and then when they finally are released they cause an avalanche of negativity. It is easy for one person to say something mildly negative and within a matter of moments have everyone in the room talking about what seems to be a complete disaster. You need to control these situations by making sure that the topic is brought around to the positive and that the negative comments, while perhaps valid and therefore acknowledged, do not rule the day.

6. **Give People an Outlet** – sometimes the best way to make sure people don't have negative feelings building up is to give them the opportunity to express their views and get answers to the questions they have. You can achieve this through management-employee meetings, an open door policy (where employees know they can come and ask you anything they want), or a web based mechanism that allows for questions to be posed by employees to management.

7. **Enable a Positive Environment** – some work environments are stifling. Not only do they serve to inhibit creativity, they also restrict freedom. People who are unhappy, for whatever reason, are also prone to being negative. Allow them to have their music, and their family photos, and their breaks, and their sense of being appreciated, and you will find that the little things that used to make them negative just don't seem that bad anymore.

8. **Invite Ideas** – people are more connected when they feel invested and they feel more invested when they are part of the process. You can never really know where the next great idea is going to come from and it does not hurt at all to invite all employees to present ideas they may have. Even if they don't come up with the next great idea (although someone probably will), make sure you respect the effort, even while rejecting the idea.

9. **Practice Collective Decision Making** – some companies find it very advantageous to open up certain decisions to the entire company. Sometimes these decisions are marketing based, like which logo is the best, and sometimes they are policy based, like whether the company should take on a competitor with a new product. The benefit to including the staff is that they have ownership of the decision and will work very hard to make it work.

There can be no complete avoidance of negative thought or feelings. In most cases you probably wouldn't want to eradicate it even if you could (you can't). The best you can do is be aware of the feelings, monitor the outbursts, and counter the affects through positive action. The windfall is greater than just happier employees, the payoff is in a healthier company.