

Employee Focus

By David Newkirk, CEO – ETHOS Consulting LLC

During unique conditions when business, personal and social circumstances all intersect at the same time, it's hard for employees to create silos between work and their personal life, preventing experiences in one area to NOT AFFECT another. This acknowledgement is the first step effective leaders take to ensure their company thrives during challenging times.

What leaders do to manage this acknowledgement is CRITICAL. Keeping employees focused is another way of saying "engaged". Studies prove engaged employees are productive, longer tenured and look for reasons to stay. During challenging times, engaged employees will step up not because they have to, but because they want to. It is the freedom of choice that exemplifies effective leadership.

Studies prove when leaders have heightened levels of anxiety and stress, they become more goal and task oriented and less "people-oriented" towards their employees. Employees feel the pressure, the culture shifts, and everyone is less happy than they were just a few weeks prior to a business continuity event. And, the shift lasts..... hurting productivity & employee engagement.

The most immediate way for a leader to maximize employee focus and engagement is by avoiding **employee false-positives**. An employee false-positive occurs when leaders demand outcomes from employees such as focus, dedication, sacrifice, etc. with the explanation of how it is important for the company. Employees have no choice but to verbally comply. What the employee feels in actuality is an increase in their anxiety & stress and a lack of the personal emotional support they need to manage and stay focused. They feel disconnected from their leader.

ACTION PLAN FOR CREATING EMPLOYEE FOCUS

- 1) Establish a connection to employees emotionally and convey understanding
- 2) Provide a risk-free, ongoing opportunity for employees to share their issues with their manager free of judgement and not used in performance reviews
- 3) Be a listener, not a problem-solver. Employees sometimes need a catharsis by just talking something out. They will ask for advice if wanted and need to invite their Manager to the task of problem-solving. By jumping too quickly to solve the problem may portray a Manager as not listening (nor caring)
- 4) As a Manager, perform unsolicited acts of kindness with employees. Ask how they are doing 1:1 and reinforce your availability to listen or help if wanted
- 5) Since verbal communication is only 7% and 93% of all communication is non-verbal, effective leaders communicate by focusing on their eye contact, maintaining a single focus on the employee (no phone or email distractions), their listening and ability to summarize & convey understanding of what the employee shared with them

Lastly, meet with employees outside of the Manager's office. Schedule a 15-minute Zoom meeting or have a cup of coffee together. Employees will always welcome a neutral setting to open-up and talk with their Manager vs. a formal office setting. Employees who appreciate the efforts of their leaders are in it for the long haul with focus, dedication and sacrifice – everything leadership wants for company success.