Positive outlook key to successful office interactions

Wednesday, February 22, 2017 18:53

Employees with a positive attitude enjoy their work and engagement with colleagues. PHOTO | FOTOSEARCH

Makena and Kibet both work in a parastatal with offices in the central business district of Nairobi. Both employees conduct similar duties as office supervisors, one over accounts payable and the other over accounts receivable.

Makena seems full of optimism. Almost every day she greets colleagues cheerfully and seems to see the proverbial glass as half full. No matter what occurs, she still smiles and proclaims that the day will go well.

On the other hand, Kibet sees the same glass as half empty. Fellow staff who greet him get an earful of “salaries are late this month” or “the office is not as efficient as usual” or “I think management is against us this month”.

As we see the contrast between the above two workers, which employee might one expect to hold greater longevity in the parastatal and enjoy the highest employment relationship stability? The overly positive Makena may come off as a bit irritating lacking sensible grounding. Meanwhile, some might argue that Kibet holds a more realistic worldview and can better withstand environmental shocks on his psychology.
However, his perceived realism yields pessimism that torpedoes his work relationships while Makena is more likely to enjoy long-term workplace relationship success.

CORPORATE DEALINGS

From bureaus to factories to offices to headquarters, we all come across a wide spectrum of individuals that hold varying degrees of lasting impact on our work lives. We often get excited after meeting a new workmate who we feel might lead to a long-term positive labour relationship. Then, no sooner than meeting that person, they shift priorities and gain interest in other corporate dealings and leave us hanging.

In short, some people come on strongly positive, but fail to deliver any workplace depth, while others hold steady over time. Now, let us add external stimuli into the equation. Often workers become less reliable interpersonally due to outside forces that impact some individuals more than others. Tali Sharot’s research states that one’s ability to predict stands as a hallmark of mental cognition. Inferences about what might happen in the future prove crucial for decision making.

Employees with strong skills in anticipating the future enables them to prepare actions that assist them to avoid harm and obtain rewards.

Most human predictions come from non-cognitive processes. In some people, the brain takes it a step further and favourably distorts perceptions and predictions to form what researchers call positive illusions.

Sandra Murray, John Holmes, and Dale Griffin note that positive distortions actually diffuses feelings of uncertainty and improves commitment and satisfaction among relationships. So certain employees are cognitively predisposed to predicting and optimistically twisting expectations about the future that improves workplace interactions. Oddly, delusional optimism acts as a desirable employee trait.

Jonathan Biggane, David Allen, and Lumina Albert’s research proposes that positive illusions help at an organisation-wide perspective too. The reason being that such perceptions can mentally empower the individual with mental resources that increase the stability of employment relationships.

Otherwise, the employing organisation and the individual employee himself or herself remains more vulnerable to physical, psychological, and financial risks in case of employment chaos or disillusionment.

During early stages of employment, most workers possess positive feelings about their jobs. Then as the transparency and reality of every workplace begins to sink in, average workers get shattered illusions that threaten their employment relationship stability. Additionally, negative shocks to employees hurt the average worker greatly.

However, employees with positive illusions put in greater efforts to master their craft, they restore their self-regard after disappointments faster, and search for greater meaning in their
work. All three effects greatly increase their employment relationship stability. The positive illusion worker also withstands negative shocks far better.

POSITIVE ILLUSIONS

How can managers bring in employees cognitively prone towards positive illusions? During interviews, ask the candidates to describe their professional world view. Ask how the prospective employee seeks meaning in their work.

Avoid employees who give shallow answers such as merely religious or family. Choose those who give a deep broad meaning interconnected with other aspects of their life, the firm, and the world at large.

Also, interviewers should also give a hypothetical challenging workplace scenario of about two or three minutes. Then ask the candidate about their perspective. See if the responses involve overly positive takes on the situation and possible outcomes.

Finally, managers should look for candidates who weave themes about pursuing mastery of their craft throughout the conversations. Employees who seek mastery hold a positive view on their future within and outside of the firm.

In summary, executives should notice that not all staff delusions exist as equals. Positive distorted illusions actually help workers quit less often, hold higher job satisfaction rates, and retain more stable workplace relationships.

Managers can actively employ positive illusion staff through the above specific techniques.

*Share your experiences about delusional employees with other Business Daily readers through #WorkerIllusions on Twitter.*