

Hobbies, interests fire up career choices

Uncovering employees' passions can keep them engaged, productive

BY MONIKA MORROW

There's an old saying that "if you love what you do, success will follow." I have come across several real-life examples of people who have turned their passions into prof- its.

First, there's Sheila. She loved the outdoors and thrived on camping, hiking, bird watching and fishing. She formalized her passion with education and is now working for a non-profit organization as an environmental educator with children.

Then there's Judy. She had been through many different career changes in her working life and understood the trials and tribulations of being in different roles, industries, cultures and management situations. She turned that experience, aligned with her passion for helping people, into a gig as a career coach.

And, finally, there's Darrin. He had a background in providing financial advice and gym membership sales along with investing in property development and management. He used those experiences and interests to become a real estate broker.

Frequently, people make career choices based on their experience or formal education, aligning their path with what's expected or available. But individuals who also take into account their passions, interests and motivators — often identified through hobbies — tend to have more satisfying and rewarding careers. Fulfilled individuals are also more likely to be highly engaged and more productive employees.

Organizations need to find ways to

boost engagement and productivity if they want to thrive as the economy continues to improve.

Various online polls conducted by Right Management in 2009 and 2010 have found many employees are feeling disgruntled about how they have been treated through the recession:

- 79 per cent report workloads have increased due to layoffs
- 50 per cent failed to take their allotted vacation last year
- 19 per cent rarely trust their manager
- 75 per cent work more than 40 hours a week
- 84 per cent want to leave their job this year, up from 60 per cent in 2010.

Passion fuels opportunity

People will be making different career choices in the coming year. Many are taking a more holistic approach to career management and evaluating what fuels their passion and interests and applying these motivators, skills and satisfiers to their career choices.

About 40 per cent of employees have either changed function or industry (or both) and about one in five have explored the idea of starting their own business, according to Right Management's recent survey of more than 30,000 employees.

This shows when people are given the choice to change career direction, most of them take it.

Managers would do well to facilitate career discussion with employees on an ongoing basis. Tune in to what motivates employees and their areas of interests and, together, try to identify how these interests align with needed roles to be filled

in the firm.

The process starts with the concept of "looking inward," which involves self-assessments to identify values, drivers, interests and motivators.

An individual may be drawn to a specific interest or subject that, over the years, has continually been part of his thoughts or activities. Such interests could include the arts, helping others, science, persuading others or environmentalism.

It then progresses to "looking outward," which involves an organizational scan with an employee's manager to identify what opportunities might exist and clarify what an employee wants to do, who to talk to (internal networking) and how to go about it through the creation of personal development plans.

The next step is "looking forward," which is essentially how to execute and find opportunities within the organization. Do these interests suggest a particular career direction? Can interests and abilities be aligned with real job market opportunities?

It may not be possible to satisfy all interests with a specific job opportunity. But there are ways to be creative and look for how components or elements of interests can be fulfilled through volunteer projects, special events, task force memberships and sabbaticals.

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