

How can we make employees proud of working for the company

1. Problem Definition and Essay Composition

The problem stated above is closely related to the motivation issue. In fact, it is one of the aspects of the concern, as a person proud of doing something will be highly motivated for achievement of effectiveness. It might be a paradox, but our high dedication for our activities and pride, can be even more "powering" than high salary. People getting big amounts of money for work that do not feel well usually start to get upset and look forward to opportunities to change their jobs. However, that does not mean, that you can underpay employees and hope that their will find satisfaction in other ways. This is quite like a Maslow's pyramid of values: if one's satisfaction from money (basic need) is guaranteed, other motivation issues can boost the effectiveness. Without supporting basic values those aspects will generate far less bonus.

We would first make some generalization, on how's pride made possible (relationship). Then we will discuss additional aspects like cultural factors and specific issues, both positive and negative. Finally, we will summarize, make conclusions and practical recommendations on solution.

2. The key point: the Relationship

Basically, the core thing of making someone proud of working in the company lies in one word: relationship. The bond between a person and a organization is however, a subtle thing to manage. It is just like a relationship between two people: sometimes it blossom with love, sometimes is dies without obvious reasons.

To make a good connection, one always need a good communication. When we fall in love in a person, we expect our partner to distinguish us from the crowd, to accept us, to listen to our words, to respect and finally to return efforts we make. Almost the same is needed when we do with a company.

First of all, people expect the corporation to identify them. You cant anticipate your staff to feel happy if you treat them only as a set of nameless gears in the machine. Management should take care of having a personal approach and show that style to the people. For instance, when a worker has some personal problems, help him to go with it. Do not force him to arrive at exact time for a couple of days or give him chances for position change. At least, let him know, that you sympathize with him. This would build a relationship. It works like saying "Oh, I am very sorry to hear that your mother has health problems. I know one fine doctor, I will give you his address. Or maybe is there another way I could help". The main importance here is not in the actual value of your medical contact, but rather in showing your care. Taking this approach, however, must be just. If other employees are starting to feel, that you unfairly treat some of them with better attitude – your position is ruined.

Then comes the acceptance of diversity. It would be a very bad way to communicate (in means of attitude broadcast, not verbal message) than all people not fit to our standards will be set aside. The company should be able to cope with flexibility. Again, it does not say you should stretch your standards to match everyone! However, in personal relationships, if you have a good bond with your partner, you would probably allow him/her some deviation from your ideals (say, you generally prefer blondes, but you do not feel uncomfortable with your brunette wife). Of course, you expect some return from that, and that is fair (e.g. your wife generally do not like bald men ...). The same is with employee – company relationship, and it is even more challenging, because you have to deal with one-to-many relationship and everybody must feel justly treated. To sum it over: it is a good way to be flexible and stretch your standards a little bit if it serves both sides.

One smart psychologist said once, that most pairs divorce, because people hear, but do not listen to. The same comes with corporation relationships. While employees can easily listen to what company is expressing, the reverse is usually far more complicated.

The numbers of employees are greater (so you have lots of sources of communication), they can fear to say what they really think, they can not notice, that you listen to them (and react the way they want) etc. Again, it does not mean, that you have to agree with what they say! But showing your interest in their opinion is a way of respecting them and therefore supporting the relationship.

Respecting your partner is next step in establishing a bond between you (the company) and an employee. In a personal amities you can show your respect in many ways. At the very base lie courtesy and mannerliness. You are not late for the meetings, nor you cancel them five minutes before their time. You are not making laughs of your partner's social status, sex or position. You are not mocking about his values. Moreover: you always can listen to adversary's position, even though you do not agree with him (just think if would you be happy if someone you like, had a habit of constantly interrupting you with "what you say is a piece of junk"). When you deal at the company level is all the same, and showing respect is a great manner of acquiring friends. People shown respect will almost always return with the same attitude even in crisis (in Poland's reality a clear example is going on strike, which will be addresses later on).

Finally, the relationship is established and all we need is to support the link. This deals with "return the favor game". Moreover, this is the game in which first to act is first to win. Psychologist often point to "virtual debt" phenomenon: if someone gives you some benefit you perceive as free (complimentary), you are far more eager to give something to him. The most interesting issue is, that it does not have to be a expensive thing (that's why salesmen used to offer "free" gifts like pencils, stick-it cards, emblems etc.). Again and again: the same comes with corporation daylife. Employees shown small, everyday "gifts" (not only material – a nice personal talk will do very well!) will be more than eager to return favor in some way (and the easiest way for them is to be effective and dedicated). This goodwill shown by the corporation of course must be a "more-what-was-expected" thing. You cant replace the conditions of your job agreement (the deal is: you work - I pay) with some fancy add-ons and hope that would work. This "breaks the rules", is unfair and wont make any positive effect (would you like your partner to say: "honey, I slept with your friend last night, but ... look, I just bought two tickets for a movie").

To sum it over: the key issue in making people proud of working for a company is building a relationship. This is very similar for your everyday experiences with your partner, so you can build a good bond with your employees much the same way you do with your friends. Practical detail, however should implement additional factors: cultural specifics, corporate profile, company's policies & practices and resource availabilities (costs). On the other hand, we must steadily improve the good image of our company. In other words, a company musty be worthy to feel pride about it. This is discussed below.

3. Cultural context

As we mentioned earlier, the pride of working for a company is based on relationship, therefore it is dependent on cultural relationship value. Some societies are very relationship-oriented, while some are far less. A Japanese culture and be a good working example. Japanese people are very relational ones (so that can make a very strong relationships with corporation). They have a very deep understanding of complicated personal one-to-one relationships. For instance, they address by different words own wife – *tsuma*, and other ones – *okusan* (the same with fathers: *chichi/oktosan* and other members of a family). When it is about description of a person (in business matters), it usually comes with the emphasize of a company dependence: "Sore wa Honda-no Takeda Takijiro desu" (This is Mr. Takijiro Takeda belonging to the Honda Corporation). Please note that "-no" particle can mean "owned by" and company's name come before the name.

When I return from my scholarship in Japan (I must admit that I am in a very deep love with this country and try to follow their profile) and started to work for a Polish company, my colleagues were a little bit shocked about my attitude to the employer and even find my habit of constant emphasizing "we, the company" strange. After a few months when I build closer relationships with my department they admit, that initially

they thought I was a owners' relative! This experience shows clearly the factor of culture in a global world!

Americans are quite well known for their non-context attitude. Whether it comes from their cross-culturality or short-term planning, is not a subject of this essay, enough to say they build values mostly on the effectiveness (the pride of your work for the company comes from its leading position, rather from the long-term bond between you and your employer). Employee Relationship Report Benchmark, published in 1999 by Walker Information i Hudson Institute revealed that only one-third of American employees look forward to stay in their company. However, the contrast effect (the more unique you are in contrast to other entities, the greater score you achieve) cause, that corporations that introduce relationship-based management reach high results.

Moreover that is a good introduction for comparison of strengths and weaknesses of individualist-oriented societies (most Western) vs non individualist ones (Eastern esp. Asian), yet I unfortunately have to stay on main subject¹.

In Europe, usually relationship-eager societies lie due south. Italians and Spanish are nice examples, while Germans are rather more task-driven in general. However, Finnish companies tend to build strong relationships, despite their northern rules.

Poland is a complicated example, as historically we have been influenced by three main centers with complete different contexts. During the Partitioning Period (1796-1918) north-western Poland was under Prussian occupation with strong protestant virtues of hardworking, but closely related to anti-polish nationalism. Southern regions were claimed by Austrian Habsburg Empire, where value of work was not in so high esteem, while people gathered build warm bond to Franz-Joseph monarchy (even today this is recalled with some nostalgic tone). Russians, who possessed eastern regions very cruel rulers and quickly led Poles to constant rebellions and uprisings. That past moved Poles to build relationships more to abstract, long-term values like homeland, rather than everyday companies. Moreover, those constant days of unrest make people move from place to place very often, which obviously weakened the company-employee traditions. On the other hand, traditional people of Silesia (mining and heavy industry) or Lodz Region (textiles) show much more powerful bond to their factories, as they used to sit in the region for generations, and a father-by-son replacement in factory was very popular phenomenon. The communist period (1945-89) enforced this attitude even more. However people were told they were "owners" of the nationalized companies, that has been only a "virtual fact". Ironically, there was no relationship those days and as well as during early years of free-market reestablishment. However, 15 years after fall of "proletariat leadership" and signs of a very high unemployment, workers started to value the long-term bonds with the corporations.

4. Company's Profiles.

Things are not the same in all companies. Some industry branches tend to be less relationship-making, some tend to be more. In Poland's experience clear example can be found in Silesia region, when traditionally generations used to work at the same mining company. For those people even salary level was not so important, as the tradition was the key issue. People felt proud that their ancestors worked the same place and build their dedication to work on that basis. That was the main reason that cause massive strikes and protests when government had to close many workplaces due to change in coal market value.

Generally, its easier to build on company with long traditions. People can gather around common virtues, especially if company was present in society's life (e.g. supporting sport teams). On the other hand, working in task-driven freelancing company can give opposite experiences. IT Consultants a quite a good example, as they gather for a year or two then scatter around the world in search for other projects. Americans are especially good at that style, but many Europeans follow that way. However, relationship can be made even in newbie corporation. The key issue is, that the more long-term

¹ However, I would be more than honored, if you will have a time to check and find interesting some of my non-scholar essays on my website. The address is ecomm.no-ip.com/wojmos

oriented the firm is, or the more visionary (yet achievable) the aim is, the easier we can get it.

The key idea here comes with the phrase "distinguish the company". If your employees receive better treatment than their friend in competitive company they would have their own corporation in very high esteem. So, try to distinguish in added values all your staff from other companies, rather your staff among themselves (that of course does not apply to financial stimulus: salary levels and effectiveness awards, but they are usually not known to public).

5. Negative factors

Probably all will agree that having people proud of what they are doing is a worthy goal. However, when all come to the reality, companies fail in even trying to reach it. Why?

Usually the main problem is funding, or to be more precisely: revenue ratio. Today's highly competitive market forces all companies to stay low on costs. Therefore first cuts are made in areas indirectly linked to core business. Can we resign from personnel training and still maintain current level of productivity? Surely we can - trainings are long-term investments. What if we have promised our staff some courses? It is a pity, but they have to understand we have cost reduction program. This way of thinking (quite ruining the motivation) we can find over and over in practice. While psychologically understandable (small benefit today is perceived as more worthy than bigger one in future), that can be suicidal, though.

Unfortunately, Poland is quite new on the way of free-market economy. In that case, there are not so many well established companies and best practices are not yet emerged. There is a significant rift between two groups of companies. The first ones try to introduce close relationship between management and workers (treating them in similar way). Those firms are usually new ones, owned or lead by young, well-educated managers, knowing of motivation potential. The second ones view employees as simply tools and often abuse them. The country's 20% unemployment ratio strengthens this approach, as people fear losing their positions. Plenty of times, so-called managers prove to be corrupted and give really bad example to employees (sucking the money from company like a parasites then leaving it struggling for the next day).

The good thing is, that the number of the last group is decreasing. The bad thing is, that third set rises in power. Those are companies, that have clever ideas of building the employees' pride, but they implement them in a clumsy ways.

6. Polish failure practices

The most common failure comes from dumb copying the western standards. This might be even called "culture misunderstanding". Many managers, filled with western experiences, full of knowledge from managerial how-to's try to implement solutions in a very rapid way. This is very risky, because if you have well established corporate culture, you can't just tell people: "everything earlier was a pile of junk - we have to start build everything from scratches".

A typical mistake was made in early market transformation in Polish mining. A young manager, who studied at some universities in USA came to Polish mine. He gathered all his staff and announced his statement: "The company is in a critical state, due to terribly wrong management in last 40 years. However, we are now to change it. First of all we would like people to identify with the company and the team, therefore everyone since this day should address people by "you", no matter of high rank."

The idea was quite good - let us integrate and remove hierarchical rules, while the implementation was context-less. The message was that factory was bad managed - but many of listeners feel that they have been participating in that. People used to express respect to each other by addressing others by name or position, which was common and well established practice, supported by Polish language syntax. Moreover, the young manager was an outsider, barely understanding Silesian dialect. In three months the whole staff was totally unmotivated and restless. Shortly the yuppie manager was

replaced by a 55 years old pro, who lead the company to success by introducing changes slowly.

Next mistake is related to honest behavior. In one Polish shipyard, a manager started to build company values on shipyard worker image: strong, hardworking man, honest and pride. As Polish shipyards workers were crucial part of anticommunist revolution, that was quite an easy task and everything went smoothly. Unfortunately the TV channel wanted to make an interview with the manager. After completion of a recording, a journalist started a private talk with a manager (keeping a hidden microphone busy). A manager laugh at the dumbness of his employees and make laughs of their low salaries. The whole audio track was then presented on the local news and people's spirit was ruin as they felt cheated and depressed.

Finally Polish companies generally do not trust in bonuses – or they do not feel their importance. This might be e reason, while still market surveys claim that only 2-5% of Polish corporations use wide non-financial bonuses programs (20% in Britain). Moreover, the average part of a bonus value is around 1-5% of a monthly salary. It is true, however, that the testimony from communist days was (is?) daunting: in many companies extra payment was almost obligatory (!) thus totally inefficient. Miners even officially received 14 payments a year, no matter of effectiveness!

The most popular bonuses are cellular phones (85% due to Hewitt Associates survey), and external trainings (80%). Furthermore, companies invest in cars or professional health services, but those apply mostly only to management staff (66%).

7. A subject of pride - Are we a part or apart?

The sole relationship is not enough. It must be a good subject to place your trust in it. This is all about the company image – the better it is, the easier is to incite a pride of being a part of it.

The well designed image starts from distinguishing mark. Historically, the teams or parties gathered around some totemic item. A symbol of integrated group. In modern days nothing has changed. Companies invest in their logos, their colors and other identification aspects not only to diverse in customers eyes, but also to have some "coat of arms" that employees could feel proud of. Therefore it is a common way to broaden the context of the brand by using it in some energetic/inspiring events or situations. Companies support national or club sport teams, thus their successes can be perceived as "own" by the employees. In Poland a good example is Polish Telecom supporting national soccer team (unfortunately company's bad image is so strong, that kibitzes complain that players are as bad as the Telekom's workers) or Prokom company who invested tremendous amounts of money in Polish club basketball.

On the other hand, sometimes too good is bad. While some companies can really benefit from equipping their personnel in uniform work clothes with recognizable signs (some Japanese home mechanics), some would fail. Just imagine creative advertisement company (where individualism and novelty is a key to success) forcing all their staff to wear same suits ...

When we are integrated around company's signs, all the company achieve we see as our triumphs. Whether the company is establishing a leading position, or invents a breaking technology, it is our pride. Under the flaunting standards of our team we can even react positively in crisis situation. In simply words: when we are a part of it – we would try to way to solve the situation, when we are apart – we would seek the possibilities to change the job.

8. Practical approach – the good policies

Basing on the general rules (described in section 2), and knowing how not to act (according to section 7) we can now propose some good solutions.

Starting a relationship is the first thing we need to do. Therefore, it is a good idea to know your employees (as far as it is possible). Good communication is crucial here. It is, however done not on regular official meetings, but rather on cafeteria assembly, or even off-time parties. While cafeteria can be a very efficient channel of corporate communication (and therefore you can shape and broadcast company's internal

perception here), off-time gatherings should be not on professional subjects. That would pass relationship onto new levels (private) and strengthen the team bonds. Moreover, if rivaling companies do not have such a policy, you would benefit from contrast effect (people would feel pride of working for so nice company and they will tell their friends of that).

Trying to integrate people on some common events (it could be anything from soccer match to fishing) will also do. However, it must be done with a respect to people's desires – a rugby match for a whole female personnel in textile company wouldn't be probable a very smart thing. This is again like in dating: if you would like to astonish you partner, invest your time in what he/she likes (not in your pleasures).

Further relationship building is based on identification of employees behavioral environment: their needs and fears. Address them by personally and empathically. If you think their concerns are about their competence level, try to offer some courses. If you feel they care about children left home, think about kindergarten room in your factory (like in Scandinavian companies – e.g. Ikea). It would be a fine thing if you solve (or at least address) problems not only of teams, but also of particular beings. That would work fine, until you start to treat one before others – so be reasonable and fair.

The last clause is worth taking in mind when dealing with internal regulations. It is a wise (yet sometimes costly) idea not to distinguish management from even lowest position in e.g. traveling conditions. A good highly accessible travel plan is a good example.

If you wont be able to support so costly initiatives, you can support social events for your employees. Psychology tells us that this is a very powerful tool, because it strikes the very close environment of a humane being (free time etc.). Therefore even a small help from a company here will be read as a great benefit.

Lets be creative and support something unusual. Say, make a karaoke contest or a fishing tournament. However if you do so – make "unusuality" your practice and introduce it slowly. Let your workers feel comfortable, not scared by your ideas! It was a total failure in my company when executive manager after a 4 years of classical "I am your boss and I am classical one" in one day went to his office in sportswear. It was like sudden thunder from clear sky and it raised suspicious about his psyche, rather that created his image as a "cool guy". Keeping that in mind I would not dare to ask my colleagues to recite early morning group chants "I am a member of my company and I am proud of that" (even though it no so uncommon in my beloved Japan).

Finally, be natural and open-minded, but by all means at first place - you have to be honest. If you are trying to be familiar with your employees and used to organize a weekend off-city for your team – you can be a tyrant in the weekdays. If you do, the weekends would be a disaster and a torture for both sides.

9. Summary. Company is your value.

It is a common fact, that integration around company's coat of arms is a need and is a great stimulation for effectiveness. While it indeed pulls some costs on the stage, it should be evaluated as a kind of investment. Moreover, the state itself support that initiatives by offering some tax bonuses and exclusive clauses and company can make use of that. Besides, it is quite well proven that strict financial motivation is not an optimal way. In many opinions (Incentive Federation Survey: 80%) people (both managerial and blue collars) pointed to non cash-related methods of motivation.

Two factors are most important for this kind of relationship building. First of all: fit your actions with employees' needs (rather than with your possibilities). Secondly, make your team (your company) distinguish from others, so your people can vaunt their background in everyday life.