

Ordinary Greatness: Harnessing Your Team's Potential to Do Extraordinary Things

Everything your organization needs to be extraordinarily successful already resides in your workforce. Here are tips for tapping into the skills, talents, and potential of your team.

It's not business as usual.

The words of business editor Jeffrey Kosnett (2009) speak to our new reality: "Don't expect the economy to 'get back on track.' It's a new track, folks." Today's business environment compels us to think differently about what we do and how we do it. Simply put, we're learning to do more with less: less money, fewer people, less guidance, and less overall certainty. Forward-thinking organizations see these difficult times as opportunities to evaluate where they are, where they want to be, and how best to get there.

Are people in your workplace in "survival mode," hoping desperately to retain their jobs, or are they performing at their highest levels, moving the whole organization forward? The answer to higher productivity, innovative market approaches, employee retention and satisfaction, and greater results is right in front of us. Everything your organization needs to be extraordinarily successful already resides in your workforce. Leveraging our "ordinary greatness"—the skills, talents, and potential of our workforce—is our single greatest opportunity for survival and success.

What Is Ordinary Greatness?

In an organization, ordinary greatness is about harnessing the energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and talents already existing within the workforce *and* establishing and nurturing a work environment that supports and cultivates the individual greatness of each person. In today's business environment, recognizing ordinary greatness is the key to not only surviving but excelling.

We often hear the phrase, "Our employees are our most valuable asset." Few organizations, however, successfully create and sustain an environment that demonstrates this truism in their everyday actions and decisions.

Nurturing a Culture of Greatness

Two elements must be in harmony to propel an organization forward: first, a culture aligned for greatness and, second, leadership that supports, promotes, and cultivates greatness. Vic Buzachero, senior vice president of human resources at San Diego-based Scripps Health, one of *Fortune* magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work For, suggests starting here: "Discover what's unique about your organization's culture, and find ways to nurture and support it."

Every organization has a culture. Some are simply a consequence of the myriad of actions, experiences, decisions, and personalities that determine over time how people think and behave while at work. By contrast, a culture that promotes or is aligned for greatness must be intentionally cultivated. The most successful organizations thoughtfully evaluate their current workplace culture and develop a strategy and a time frame for making changes. Over time, organizations that do this well often earn a reputation as "career destinations." They see greater productivity, higher employee engagement, better talent retention, and innovative approaches to issues and challenges.

Four Strategies for Greatness

An organization aligned for greatness is built on a foundation of four basic strategies: clarity, claim of ownership, committed communication, and connectivity via systems and processes. Let's look at each in turn.

Clarity. A survey of 336 organizations by Right Management Consultants found that only one-third of employees are fully engaged and know their employers' missions. According to the survey, the main reason employees are disengaged is their employers' failure to communicate organizational strategies (Katz 2006). Successful organizations provide much-needed clarity that connects people and their work to meaningful goals and strategies, especially in tough times. Marketing and communication professionals are finding themselves "at the table" more often as their skill set is needed to clearly and consistently articulate their organization's position, where it is strong, and where it needs to change.

Lee Memorial Health System in Fort Myers, Florida, with 7 hospitals and 10,000 employees, knew that clarity would be a critical factor as it developed strategies to significantly downsize and restructure its workforce. Knowing it was vital to set goals and reach a consensus quickly allowed the organization to react appropriately to trends and keep everyone focused on the big picture instead of getting mired in the minutiae. Jon Cecil, senior vice president of human resources, discovered that "the further from the top leadership employees got, the more effort it took to establish and maintain organizational clarity." The marketing and communications staff worked overtime to ensure all messaging was clear, consistent, and timely.

Claim of ownership. Ownership means actively looking out for the organization's best interests and its bottom line. Claim of ownership is a commitment from an individual to view the organization as if he or she owned it.

How do organizations inspire their people to claim ownership? Scripps Health has several ongoing strategies to create employee ownership, including a "hot seat" that lets employees e-mail the CEO and senior leadership team with questions or concerns. Employees usually receive a written response within a few hours, and all questions and answers are published for organization-wide access.

Committed communication. Feeling informed and valued generates commitment and energy throughout the workforce. In his book *Moments of Truth* (1987), Jan Carlzon wrote, "An individual without information cannot take responsibility; an individual who is given information cannot help but take responsibility."

Never before has transparency in communication played such a key role in capturing the commitment of our colleagues.

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Marketing and communication professionals are finding that the complexity of today's messaging networks creates unprecedented opportunities for organizations to communicate instantly—and more. Instead of simply sending messages to their people, organizations are inviting their people to help create those messages.

Diane Ewing, vice president of marketing and communications at Premier Health Partners in Dayton, Ohio, says her organization has recognized the need to enhance communications beyond the more traditional weekly or monthly employee newsletter.

Additional communications to employees have been produced, all designed to share consistent message points while still providing specific details for the individual hospital or entity. Ewing notes that the process includes substantial input from colleagues across the system and that the end product is a collaborative team effort. Employee input is gained using a variety of methods, including administrative rounding, with subsequent questions and answers shared with employees. Never underestimate the power of these four words: "What do you think?"

Is Your Department Poised for Greatness?

The Organizational Mindset Assessment below will assist in identifying your department's areas of strength as well as areas that require your attention. The tool can be used with your team to gain insight into their perceptions. It also can be used to solicit ideas and suggestions for improvement by converting each statement into a "how can" question (e.g., How can senior leaders be more visible and interactive with front-line staff?).

Instructions: For each statement, circle the number that best describes your department or organization. Organizations poised for greatness strive to achieve a 5 rating for each assessment item.

Organizational Mindset Assessment

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Senior leaders are visible and interactive with front-line employees on a daily basis.	1	2	3	4	5
Employee ideas on how to improve department performance are actively encouraged.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders in my department coach employees to achieve extraordinary results.	1	2	3	4	5
Employees are evaluated not only on performance but also for potential.	1	2	3	4	5
Among leadership, there is a deep understanding of what drives employee engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
All employees feel a sense of ownership in the department's success.	1	2	3	4	5
The potential of every employee in my department has been identified.	1	2	3	4	5
Employee feedback on the perceived cultural attributes of the department is used to develop appropriate strategies to strengthen the culture.	1	2	3	4	5
Real decision-making authority exists at all levels of the department, not just with senior leaders.	1	2	3	4	5
My department is operating at its fullest potential.	1	2	3	4	5
The leaders in my department are strong communicators.	1	2	3	4	5
The leaders in my department model desired behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
We retain our highest-performing employees.	1	2	3	4	5
Our leaders use rewards and recognition strategies effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
My senior leadership team is functioning at the highest level possible, with maximum cohesion and clarity.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaders help employees connect their job responsibilities to the goals and strategies of the department.	1	2	3	4	5
The department's goals and strategies are communicated to all employees on a continual basis.	1	2	3	4	5
My department has a culture of accountability.	1	2	3	4	5
The majority of employees in my department would respond that they feel in the loop.	1	2	3	4	5
We periodically challenge the systems and processes we have in place to ensure they are still efficient and effective.	1	2	3	4	5
We consider "fit" a critical component of selecting new employees.	1	2	3	4	5
Training and development are linked to our strategic business priorities.	1	2	3	4	5

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Connectivity via systems and processes. In correctly aligned organizations, the parts and pieces work smoothly together to achieve goals. There is an obvious connection that joins the organization's focus and work, determines how the workforce functions on a day-to-day basis, and demonstrates how invested the workforce is in the organization's success. Alignment is crucial in ensuring that an organization's culture supports the concept of ordinary greatness.

Collaboration between departments and divisions within the organization is a critical strategy to achieve this alignment. Jean Hitchcock, vice president of marketing and communications at Scripps Health, describes a partnership approach with Human Resources to develop and manage internal communications and connect the organization's internal and external messaging. By identifying the types of communication needed, the appropriate person(s) to convey the message, and the best deployment methods, the organization ensures maximum authenticity and impact.

Through a matrixed staff position that fully participates in each division, the two areas have found additional opportunities to leverage their respective knowledge and skills. Marketing/Communications and Human Resources have found great success in the partnership: recruitment goals have been surpassed for three consecutive years, and scores on internal communication have seen significant increases—or, as Jean puts it, “have gone through the roof.”

Priorities for Organizational Leaders

To be truly effective, organizational strategies have to be embodied in leaders whose behavior supports and drives ordinary greatness throughout the organization. Specifically, leadership behaviors should (1) set the context for greatness, (2) promote greatness, and, finally, (3) cultivate the potential for greatness.

Leaders set the context for greatness throughout the organization by establishing an environment that encourages everyone to work to the best of their abilities. It starts at the top. Knowing they are there to serve those they lead, leaders must be visible, accessible, and approachable, and must model the behaviors they desire in others.

A top priority of leadership should be identifying and recognizing the greatness that occurs every day. What is celebrated is repeated. Successful leaders also get their staffs involved capturing staff ideas and putting those ideas to work—acknowledging their contributions and their value to the organization.

Cultivating the potential of the workforce is perhaps the greatest missed opportunity in today's business world. The challenge for leaders is to have a ready answer to the question, “What will it take for my employees to say at the end of each day, “I reached my fullest potential”?” It requires the leader to have a deep understanding of each person's strengths and opportunities for development, their source of motivation, and their aspirations.

Change is inevitable, and organizations can help navigate changing economic conditions by investing in our single greatest renewable resource—our people. Aligning ourselves to recognize

and inspire ordinary greatness will not only prove invaluable as we ride out these economic conditions; it will ensure we are well positioned when the upturn comes.


Editor's note: Want to know more about engaging your team to achieve extraordinary results? Mark November 4 on your calendar and plan to attend Pam Bilbrey's webcast, “Ordinary Greatness: It's Where You Least Expect It...Everywhere.” There's no charge for SHSMD members.

References

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SHSMD Datebook

September 14–25

Online course: “Orientation to Healthcare” with David Kantor

September 16

Webcast: “The Six Greatest Failures of Hospital Strategic Plans” (no fee for SHSMD members)

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Connections 2009: The SHSMD Annual Educational Conference and Exhibits, Orlando, FL

October 12–23

Online course: “Healthcare Market Research 101” with Rob Klein

October 19–November 1

Online course: “Marketing Plans That Work” with David Marlowe

November 4

Webcast: “Ordinary Greatness: It's Where You Least Expect It ... Everywhere” (no fee for SHSMD members)

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Ongoing

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For more information on these professional development opportunities, go to shsm.org and click on the SHSMD U tab. For more information on the 2009 Annual Conference, click on the Annual Conference tab.

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