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A Corporate CEO Interviews Rockport Director, Nicholas Lore

How can a company attract and keep the best possible people?

Nick Lore: The real answer doesn't involve tips and suggestions about what people can do in the short run. It's a bigger, broader, contextual answer. For a company to attract and keep good people, they have to offer what people really want. And what they want is to truly feel a part of a family, where people are taking care of each other, where management really cares about them, where they're genuinely listened to, that their bosses behave with integrity toward them, that the company essentially be a partnership of all the people who work for it.

What is the source of that kind of corporate philosophy?

Nick Lore: It comes from a realization that all any company is, is a group of people. The technology, the machinery, the buildings and infrastructure mean nothing without the people. And there's no way you can fake it.

How can we attract the people we want?

Nick Lore: Good people are attracted to companies that are really committed to doing a world-class job of taking care of and developing their people. They come to work for such companies not just because they need a job, but because they really want to work there.

What would you say are the overall qualities we should look for?

Nick Lore: They're people who are simultaneously talented-gifted at what they're doing-and self-actualized, people who find fulfillment in using their abilities to the fullest. They're people who want to move ahead not only professionally, but personally. And people like that want to work for companies that nurture them.

Why do so many companies give so little thought to nurturing their employees?

Nick Lore: If you ask them, they say they do. They pay lip service to the idea. But the truth is, most companies provide a poisonous work environment, at least to some degree. And instead of admitting it, they try to cover things up. Whenever they get caught doing something wrong, they do everything possible to deny, deny, deny. A mature company, which isn't run by overgrown children, will admit its mistakes and clean them up. In fact, they are enthusiastic about finding errors and fixing mistakes.

A company can't be unprincipled in its external actions and principled in its internal operations. That's schizophrenia, and it doesn't work. So when a company like Exxon, for instance, tries to minimize the Valdez oil spill, you know that it's denying its internal errors as well.

These days people are talking about companies having a sense of purpose. What about that?

Nick Lore: Even companies that start out with a purpose quickly change into companies whose only purpose is to perpetuate themselves, to survive and grow. The notion of purpose or shared vision is lost.

How would a company find a purpose?

Nick Lore: There's nothing to find or discover. They have to invent it. The leaders must intentionally create it. And simple persistence is not a worthy purpose.

Isn't a corporate mission statement the same thing?

Nick Lore: It certainly could be, but for the most part corporate mission statements are mostly bullshit. Someone has taken courses and read books about modern management technique and they've learned to write mission statements. But top management rarely lives by those statements. Most of the time, employees will look at the posters on the wall and make rude jokes about them, because they can see their boss doesn't live it and their boss's boss doesn't live it.

Then what do you mean by purpose?

Nick Lore: Purpose is an invented-created reason for being. It is who you are simply because that's who you say you are. It is a bold statement that you live from, that generates what you do, and how you behave. In the days when Apple Computer was clearly living from purpose for their first few years. Extraordinary companies, like Federal Express are enlightened by a purpose that most of the employees subscribe to and live from. Whenever you notice that the employees of a company are full of enthusiasm and commitment, you can infer that it is likely that company lives from a purpose that includes nurturing their people. The really brilliant companies truly live what they've dedicated themselves to, whether it is to be a great place to work, or create great products or world-class service for customers. That's what purpose is.

How can companies change?

Nick Lore: By looking at themselves realistically and by changing so that they actually honor what they've been paying lip service to, not manipulating people anymore, for instance, but instead supporting their people and encouraging full self-expression. It's not that companies don't want to see the truth, but that they're sleepwalking. They need someone to tap them on the shoulder.

Why does this happen?

Nick Lore: It's a natural human instinct-to find and try to maintain equilibrium. We can't pay attention to everything. We just don't have the capacity. So we tune out many things in life. We don't think, when we're walking, "one foot, other foot, one foot, other foot." Trouble is, we sometimes live our whole lives that way, sleepwalking. When we're in equilibrium, we reduce the risks of feeling pain. But we also reduce the possibilities of feeling pleasure. That's one reason why consciousness is so much better than sleepwalking. Being truly awake is risky, but it's an adventure. And that's what I call on people to do: to live their lives as an adventure, not seeking comfort or happiness, but seeking fulfillment