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If people lack hope, they simply give up. In business this means that people stop trying, they lose creativity or potentially leave your organisation. This is the very last thing you need when you are trying to navigate difficult times and create sustainable growth.

In the last two years, as confidence has fallen, so it is also sadly true that the communication gap has increased between the top and bottom of many organisations. All too often, employees feel that if they express their concerns, they will be seen as a “negative influence” and their career may be damaged, and so instead people talk behind closed doors and negativity spreads like wildfire. So how do you accurately gauge levels of confidence and then act positively upon them?

Now is not the time for comprehensive “employee surveys” nor cascade processes. It is a time for senior leaders to interact on a face to face basis with as many people as they can. The purpose of this is not to “sell confidence” but ask good questions and then listen. If you ask an individual if they are feeling confident, it is very likely that they will tell you what they think you want to hear, if on the other hand you ask them “if they think confidence in the business is higher or lower than 12 months ago?” then you are asking them their opinion on the confidence of others. As ever, open questions will get you the most interesting information. If you hear things you don’t like, do not get defensive, after all this is only feedback based on the genuine perceptions of others.

Employees need to have a sense of belief in the future sustainability of the business or, more precisely, to have hope. They need to believe that the vision for the business is possible, is something that they desire and is aligned to their personal ambitions and needs. This is something HR needs to ensure is communicated throughout the business, as it must answer the critical questions that exist in everyone’s minds:

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- Do I want to be part of it?
- Does this organisation have the capability to get there?
- Do I believe that the leaders are up to it?
- What does it mean for me?

There are some simple steps you can take to ensure that the vision you create for your

employees is one that is believable and engaging – creating hope:

Build the picture

Employees want to know where they are being led and, critically, they want to know why this is the right direction. The leaders may be thinking long term, but employees may be worried only about getting through the year.

Keep it fresh

Always remember that events can change, so your vision will need some flexibility. If the organisation continues to pursue a vision that current realities are proving to be unrealistic, do not be surprised if your people start to lose hope.

Ensure that there is faith in your leadership

People follow leaders because they believe they are capable of taking them to where they want to go and not just because they are the 'appointed leaders'.

Your leadership team is under constant and highly critical scrutiny from the people who work in your business, as they decide whether to entrust their futures in your combined abilities. The leadership team must be seen to be working as one, aligning their energies and efforts to a single and unifying ambition for the business. Whilst differences of opinion and conflict are healthy within a team, your employees cannot see this or your success will be undermined.

Build your talent pipeline now

Once you have a clear picture of what your business will look like and needs to deliver in the future, you know what organisational capability you need to develop, and you will understand the culture that you need to create or sustain. You can then accurately define the competencies that your leaders of the future will need to possess.

Avoid insanity

One definition of insanity is to continue to do everything you have done in the past, but expect

different results. Employees work with the daily reality of your business – they know what is working and what is not and it is against such pragmatic and tangible evidence that they will finally assess their level of hope.

...and finally

In any cycle of change, either driven by harsh economic conditions or indeed buoyant growth, there will come a time when your people experience feelings of frustration, fear, denial, uncertainty and even anger. These feelings are often triggers that create employee disengagement, a disease that according to Gallup is costing the UK economy between £ 37 and £ 39 billion per annum. The same research also showed that each actively disengaged worker costs their employer nearly £ 9,000 per year in lost productivity, that senior management's attitude towards employees has a greater impact on engagement than day-to-day factors, and that the top driver of employee engagement is senior management's 'sincere' interest in employee well-being.

Thus, a genuine sense of hope for the future is what inspires people to move on from these negative feelings and will re-engage your people in helping you to move from survival to sustainable growth.