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Paint a picture of your workplace

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By Val Leveson

How do businesses keep up with the rate of change and challenge facing them? Ways of working now can be quite different in a year's time, or even a few months. It's about being able to adapt, seeing what's ahead and having an understanding of what customers want. It's also about understanding the needs of employees to keep them engaged and the workplace dynamic enough to be able to adjust to anything.

Most experts agree - the old ways of running a company are no longer working. Hiring an employee and keeping that person tied to whatever skill he/she entered the business with and never expecting more from the person is a route to disaffection and ultimately resignation.

The best employees no longer want a job for life, they're impatient with hierarchies, they want to grow and learn in their working environment. If they feel stifled, they'll either move on or become the employee you don't want - someone who is unmotivated, listless and bored.

Stimulating positive outcomes for your company means seeing obstacles and challenges as learning opportunities. They're a way of building on and improving the strengths and aspirations of the people who already make up the fabric of your business. So says David Kayrouz of Creative Pathways, an artist who has formulated workshops for organisations and individuals to enhance their creativity.

Kayrouz explains: "Bringing creativity into the workplace improves the business environment. It helps make things both flexible and challenging and can shift many things that otherwise may not be working."

Kayrouz sees his techniques as opening dialogue between employees and also a way of dealing with staff difficulties. "It can be used as a type of team-building. Creativity is crucial to many things."

He thinks businesses that ignore the emotional, creative and intuitive side of their employees, seeing them purely as rational "machines" applying their intellect to work problems, are missing out on fostering real employee engagement - and hurting their businesses as a result.

He says creativity can help a business and its employees regain an understanding of what they're doing and why. "By encouraging staff to be creative, you are getting them to take responsibility. When someone is behaving creatively, that person is totally engaged in the task. It's about allowing your staff fulfilment and self learning."

Kayrouz initially trained as an engineer and established and developed a successful furniture manufacturing company. He led this company for 15 years before selling it. He has been involved in visual art for 20 years, and is also a violinist with a "deep love of music".

Kayrouz is passionate about his workshops and sees painting as a different way for staff to communicate - changing what could otherwise be a stilted dialogue. An example of this is an exercise he introduces in his workshops. Two people work together - one starts a painting with one stroke, the other "replies" with another. The work of art becomes a collaboration; a visual dialogue.

Kayrouz says the exercise is one of many that helps develop empathy in the people who do his workshops. Think of how important this is for your business. If your employees are empathetic to your clients' needs, they will keep on coming back.

"Empathy comes from the imagination - being able to imagine what someone else's needs are and what they are feeling. When we are creating thoughts and feelings in symbols rather than just words, there are more possibilities; we can suspend judgment and explore.

"What I'm doing is helping people engage all their senses through art. It's about engaging with ambiguity and diversity and bringing together the sense that there are rules and there are no rules.

"In short, the art medium engages the whole brain. Creativity brings everything together. It's about working with an open heart - there's no place for cynicism or fear in creativity. It's about developing insight, saturation, illumination and verification."

In between each exercise in his workshop, Karouz explains the motivation behind it. He shows participants how thinking deeply and creatively can bring about better solutions than just concentrating on the obvious. He also demonstrates how creative collaboration can bring about better solutions than individual ideas.

He says his workshop exercises help people to communicate with each other. "Co-creativity can bring more results. What I do encourages open listening and no censorship. It's about opening a different space for a new communication."

Kayrouz doesn't think it's a problem if employees do not see themselves as creative or able to paint. "Everyone is creative - I don't really believe in the concept of talent, we are all born with ability but how we have been encouraged and our personalities make that develop. I use the medium of painting - but it's not about creating great works of art, it's about the experience and being able to engage fully. Art allows honesty and trust to come in."

His Creative Pathways website says that by doing the workshops you and your team will learn about creative self-management, build stronger team spirit and collaboration, become more engaged, develop communication and leadership skills. see and act on innovative potential and focus on desired outcomes and use available resources to meet them.

He says his workshops can be ongoing, depending on how they're used. For individuals who may not be connected with a company or are self-employed, or those who just want to test out what he does, he has a half-day workshop in Devonport called Paint Your Business Skills. He also gets contracted by businesses to do a series of workshops in the workplace.

He has some structured programmes such as Cultural Transformation, which is about developing a creative culture within an organisation; Enhancing Engagement; Group Collaboration, which helps teams brainstorm and generate new ideas together through painting; Team Starter, which is about improving teamwork by stimulating new ways of thinking (two hours); Surfacing Creative Behaviour, allowing your team to explore their creative intelligence and learn how to apply the lessons of art to other situations (four sessions); and Tailored Programmes that take your specific team-building needs and issues into account.

Kayrouz's website can be found at www.creativepathways.co.nz.

His next Paint Your Business Skills workshop is on Friday, August 29.

This story was found at:

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/11/story.cfm?c_id=11&objectid=10527896&pnum=0