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Leading with Knowledge

ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS REQUIRES AN ACTIVE APPROACH TO SHARING KNOWLEDGE. But gaps can exist in companies between those who have knowledge and those who would benefit from more knowledge. Consider the equipment finance industry. We have industry veterans as well as a younger workforce. Is there a system in place at your company for veterans to share “hard-won experience” with others? The company that ignores this puts itself in severe jeopardy.

Two Classes of Knowledge

Two classes of knowledge exist: tacit and explicit. Tacit represents unwritten knowledge, including our emotions, experiences and intuition. Explicit knowledge is anything written down or expressed in a tangible form.

While knowledge is essentially “Information + Action,” it’s easier to consider it as a timeline that begins with raw data. Once filtered and evaluated, the data have the potential to become information. If the information is tied to a future action, it transforms into knowledge.

Who Has It?

Considerable untapped reservoirs of tacit knowledge exist in each of us. Knowing this is the easy part. Surfacing it, and identifying a proper use once found, remains the greater challenge.

How Do We Begin?

Bridging knowledge gaps requires two things: planning and advocacy. It will not happen on its own. Taking “lessons learned” and converting them to “best practices” takes more than a memo. Here are a few things you can do to start.

1. Success in anything begins at the personal level. Get smart about who has knowledge in your company and how it might be shared.
2. Succession planning, and not only at the executive level, is often overlooked. If quality talent can’t see advancement opportunity, they may seek employment elsewhere. These situations can represent critical knowledge losses in any company. Don’t ignore it.
3. Deloitte’s “2018 Global Human Capital Trends” report advises: “[Have employees...] work with other teams. Remove or reduce boundary, function and silo thinking.” This allows the development of a skill psychologist Howard Gardner calls “searchlight intelligence.” This is a learned ability to scan an environment to find connections, even if none seem to exist. As leaders, it is up to us to create these workflow paths to the right resources. There is no better way to develop problem-solving, cognitive and social skills. By doing so, we equip individuals to better handle a world that’s hard to predict.

Managing context, not content, is the future. This is an important distinction. We don’t need more, but we need to do more with what we have. If you want to lead with knowledge, knowing isn’t enough. The critical step of transforming information requires advocacy. It is not enough to understand and not communicate. Nor is it wise to communicate without understanding. Maintaining relevance today requires both.

Don’t have the answers you want? Start by asking more questions. ☰

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