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You are whom you surround yourself with

How good employees create a magnet for other good employees

As parents, we are vigilant about our children's choice of friends. We are rightly concerned with peer influence on our daughters and sons alike, and we go to great lengths to ensure that certain people are either "in" or "out" of our children's lives.

We know our kids will be judged in part by whom they hang with, and we know their peer group will strongly influence their attitudes and behaviors. So it is extremely important that such influences on our children and their future are healthy, honest, hardworking and so on. It's an agenda we parents never let go of.

Yet curiously, as leaders, we seem to relax that vigilance when it comes to whom we surround ourselves with at work. This is especially true the longer we are in a job or with a company.

New employees use the caliber of the people as a key criterion in deciding whether or not to sign on, but that standard nearly disappears as time goes on.

Employees are retained, bonuses are paid and promotions are given — often based solely on whether short-term business results are delivered. Concern for how employees get those results is increasingly discussed in talent reviews, but in practice, the how still gets trumped by simply achieving short-term results.

Leaders increasingly tolerate aberrations in behavior in themselves and others, under the rubric of "what is best for the business ..." "what it takes to get the business ..." "what we must sacrifice to deliver the business ..." — and this is a very slippery slope.

Before you know it, you find yourself confronted by issues of ethics, accounting adjustments, product quality and contamination issues, workplace injuries, abuse of company property, etc. Not to mention facing unwanted attrition of the "good guys" who see the situation clearly and vote with their feet.

What's essential for success?

A few years ago, I co-authored a study of more than two-dozen sitting CEOs of top global companies. We interviewed them to identify qualities they saw as essential for success. These CEOs reported six qualities that were most necessary and most contributory to their success:

1. Integrity
2. Courage
3. Intellectual curiosity and continuous learning
4. Resilience
5. Self-awareness and humility
6. Dispassionate compassion

Underlying each of these qualities is recognition that who and how matter a lot. Great companies with sustainable high levels of performance are about far

more than just business results. These companies are about people at all levels who are dedicated to their organization's mission, who are aligned and intentional in their actions, and who model behaviors consistent with the company's moral fabric.

They seem to understand, better than most, that tolerance of behavior that is inconsistent with those six qualities sends strong, undesirable signals to the rest of the company that, as long as you deliver results, the rest doesn't matter.

What is incredibly oxygenating is that, as with our children, surrounding ourselves and populating our companies with the right people — those who lean in to their work and who model high integrity, courage, resilience, self-awareness, and humility — creates a magnet for more like them.

People want to be a part of a winning culture and a winning team. They want to be proud, not just of what they did, but also of who they did it with, and how. We must never forget this. Who you surround yourself with still tells the world a lot about you. Just ask your parents. ●

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