Workplace Mediocrity
-- and they say corporate charity is dead...!

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It really is all too commonplace today to reward mediocrity. Our systems of compensation, communications, motivations and even leadership techniques all provide the environment for less-than-stellar performers to feel quite good about themselves.

Companies feel that to completely deny a pay increase for multiple years - something sensible for the truly mediocre - is akin to inhumane treatment. It's not; it's just good business. Think about it - you aren't doing as much for me as you should, so I should pay you more money.

What a crock... How, in all of sanity, does that thinking arise?

Additionally, our management techniques focus way too much on "developing" or improving the mediocre worker. True, some of that is necessary, as some marginal performers may actually reach satisfactory levels with some encouragement. Better, in my mind, to spend those resources on effective hiring practices that reduce the incoming mediocrity.

What to do? Focus on high performance. Focus on those things and people that are true differentiators that make the organization and employee stand out from the crowd. Zero in on your high performing employees, and build motivation and rewards systems around them, instead of around the masses.

Realize - and communicate this widely - that mediocrity is NOT OK.

A mediocre employee MUST become a satisfactory or better employee within a brief but reasonable timeframe, or they should be removed from the organization. Reward - truly reward - high performance.
Make the difference between mediocrity and greatness obvious and painful. These things are difficult to implement, and need real leadership to nurture; they are, however, absolutely necessary if we ever hope to cast out mediocrity in favor of high performance.

Also interestingly, I have a client that depends heavily on its technical (engineering) talent. This same client has great difficulty making the "termination" decision even when it's clear that the particular employee is incapable of acceptable levels of performance.

This is the sort of intentional distress we cause, and we should begin both awareness and elimination as a plan for 2010.

We, as people, tend to feel sorry for (and maybe protective of) those people we see as mediocre, as if they need our help to continue with life. They really don't, and we may be enabling them to continue in a role for which they are completely ill-suited.

Besides, corporate charity and giving should not be synonymous with employment. Keep them separate so, if nothing else, we can accurately determine where charity stops and performance requirements begin...

Triangle Performance, LLC, is a solutions-focused management consulting firm specializing in creating measurable financial success through deliberate, effective, and creative human capital strategies. Deliverables are uniquely designed to provide a tangible, measurable return on investment, typically by a significant multiple.

Our results are measurable and guaranteed.

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