HOW TO CRAFT A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – PART I

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THE TRUTH IS, THE EXTENT TO WHICH PEOPLE IN YOUR SHOP ARE LEARNING AND GROWING IN THEIR ROLE doesn't solely depend on the subject matter. It also depends on *the extent to which you believe the subject matters*. You have a choice whether or not to prioritize your employees growth.

Let me strengthen the case for you.

Doing so not only is the right thing to do for the employee, it is an imperative thing to do for the business.

Ray Stata, former chairman of Analog Devices and a pioneer in creating learning organizations, said: "The rate at which individuals and organizations learn may become the only sustainable competitive advantage."

A study by the Brookings Institution revealed that 60 percent of an organization's competitive advantage is derived from internal advancements in knowledge, innovation, and learning.

Steve Shifman, CEO of Michelman (a fast-growing specialty chemicals company), told me the need for a learning organization is an absolute essential: "Otherwise the bell curve shifts to the right with today's rate of change and our knowledge base slides toward the average middle." In other words, what we know today that provides competitive advantage will be cost-of-entry knowledge tomorrow, and without continual learning, we'll soon fall

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behind. In fact, studies show that knowledge gained in college becomes obsolete in two to five years for many disciplines.

Shifman further described learning and growth as the centerpiece of his company's operating model and believes it is the very definition of facilitating a sense of meaning from one's work: "Meaning at work comes from knowing I am providing for learning and growing experiences that people just wouldn't have if it were not for their time at Michelman. It can shape their lives." So working in a learning and growth environment is right for the employees, and right for the employer.

Now it's a matter of true commitment from you as a leader. The good news is that there is plenty you can do to foster a sense of discovery for your employees. What follows is a list of time tested and research proven ways to be conducive to learning:

- Have patience and empathy for the learning process (and tolerance for mistakes).

- Have a "not yet" mindset vs. a "you failed" mindset.

- Put emphasis on assets, not deficits.

- Listen for understanding, not for convincing others.

- Focus on being interested, not interesting (to encourage learning and sharing).

- Enable ownership of ideas (don't do too much for them).

- Use data to go from "I think" to "I know." But don't let "I know" get in the way of "I think."

- Talk openly about the importance of learning. Role-model the priority you give to learning.

- Encourage "the sky's the limit" thinking, not limited thinking.

- Commend (not condemn) the person who brings conflicting information.

- Don't rewrite history, remember it. Then use realizations to move forward.

- Change "we've tried that before, sorry" to "let's try that again, smartly."

- Show a genuine interest in each individual's unique learning journey.

- Take the time to teach in teachable moments.

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