

The Agony of Workers

With the global and national focus now on competitiveness, efficiencies and productivity, the repeated calls for greater levels of worker productivity is well founded. For this attainment there ought to be recognition of what changes if any, are to be made to the existing workplace culture. At the fore front of this should be an assessment made of the workplace environment. The purpose for this would be to make a determination of whether it lends to promoting worker productivity, or the flip side, which is that it undermines the achievement of the desired intention.

Providing a comfortable place of work is only the first step that should engage the attention of private sector employers and government as the public sector employer. The state of the physical plant must be conducive in order to have a positive impact on the state of mind of employees. Buildings and/or office spaces which are less than esthetically pleasing, that is, being an eye sore, cannot serve as a motivating factor. Added to this is the threat imposed to health and safety. This presents a fear factor, as the threat of imminent danger constantly looms. There are always the lingering health hazards, and much of this is due to poor building maintenance, and the lack of industrial cleaning.

Based on these negative features, it shouldn't come as a surprise to employers if there is either a high level of reported illness or absenteeism being experienced. If this trend exists, the million dollar question is ... What is being done about it? Employees should be made to have a sense of pride in the place at which they work. It is to be expected that they make an effort to maintain the cleanliness of the environment, and exercise a duty of care to the physical care and equipment. None of this is likely to happen if the employer and management does not set the standards and work to maintain them. Can workers be blamed, if they develop a negative attitude where owners and management show no leadership?

The complaints laid by workers vary from health and safety issues to include the negative attitudes and dispositions displayed by owners and managers. Where the top-down approach permeates the enterprise and its application is abused, then the net effect is the turnoff of workers. Generally the negative attitudes, dispositions and the rigorously followed top-down approach have the net effect of marginalizing, dividing, excluding workers from the decision making process, and finally demotivating them. These lend to the creation of a hostile environment where tensions exists at various levels of the enterprise. The prevalence of this is not good for workplace relations and for stimulating productivity.

One of the biggest irritants that can be found in the workplace is the nonpayment of wages or salaries when due, and for any extended period thereafter. Why should an employer fail to develop and provide incentive and benefit schemes, or to develop reward/recognition programmes, so that workers can have a sense that their efforts are appreciated? Why should an employee fail to meet the statutory employee payments; namely the social security benefits payments to the National Insurance Scheme or the PAYE to the Barbados Revenue Authority? The PAYE is a withholding tax which simply means 'Pay As You Earn.'

The distress of this is the demands the employer/management continue to make of the employee although well aware of the failure to meet their obligation to the employee. Is there a conscience when it comes to suggesting the enforcement of discipline or imposing a threat of dismissal of an employee for displaying a poor work ethic? Is it fair to unfairly threaten the promotion of employees with the organization? Why should an employee be the victims of supersession? These are but a few of the negatives that contribute to declining worker productivity, interest, commitment and motivation, that are all important if there is a national buy-in to improving competitiveness and efficiencies.