

# Turning managers into leaders at Heinz

Anthony Landale

**M**ost companies will talk loudly about how the employees are their best asset. They then carry on operating in ways that are designed precisely to demotivate and obstruct that very asset.

They do this by imposing controls that slow staff down, and by implementing procedures that frustrate and over-complicate life for the staff. This is all caused by the need for managers to control; but the performance of staff is something that cannot be controlled. And until managers understand this, and develop a different kind of mindset for handling employees, they will never get the best out of their workers.

Managers do have an essential role in helping to create the conditions for high performance. But

the real breakthrough for optimisation of human resources appears when employees begin to lead themselves – and make the commitment to bring more of their passion for self-improvement to their working environment.

The evidence that such breakthroughs are within reach comes when you ask people what difference it would make to their performance if they felt inspired. Most people say they could improve by at least 30 per cent. And many people feel confident that they could even double their impact. If these startling figures are true, are there any viable ways in which managers can help people to release this discretionary effort?

## Squeezing the bottle

The answer for companies lies in

turning their managers into leaders. Firms are always under intense pressure to achieve bottom-line improvements and this typically translates into a demand on people to work harder, faster and more efficiently. But trying to do this through management command is self-defeating. Make this the foundation of an improvement strategy and you will quickly find a workforce that is stressed, exhausted and demoralised.

Leadership, on the other hand, offers a far more powerful solution. Effective leaders don't use the tools of discipline and control. On the contrary – they understand that empowerment leads to motivation, and that given the right motivation, people are more than ready to get inspired. But too many managers block their staff's talents by →

→ insisting that it's up to the managers to make all the decisions. This makes an employee less able to work quickly, and less willing to work hard. Needless to say, many managers compound the problem by communicating their instructions badly.

The reasons for this are manifold and all too human. To justify their roles as managers, these controlling types need to be seen to be managing – which usually translates into a heavy-handed obsession with control. If, on the other hand, managers want to establish a high performance culture, then they need to learn to redistribute responsibility, encourage people to bring more of their ideas into the workplace and find ways to support their staff's own ambitions.

### More sauce for your bucks

This is the cultural mindset that has been absorbed at Heinz. New management processes were introduced in 2004 at the UK sales division, and the refreshed approach is now being expanded to other areas of the business. Ray Cornwall, training and development manager for sales and marketing at Heinz explains: "Modernising the business culture was seen as a big opportunity and an enabler to drive change. We

work for Heinz, and to uncover what conditions would need to be in place to enable staff to improve their performance.

"The process of asking our people what they wanted, and listening to their answers, was really important," says Ray Cornwall. "But the deeper issue here was to give people the opportunity, beliefs and permission to create and own an environment that would allow them to work far more effectively and perform at their best."

The groups came back with powerful insights about the prevailing culture. They highlighted challenges around leadership, goal setting and trust and they also expressed a genuine readiness to take more ownership and bring more of themselves to work. For Cornwall, "all of this research showed that, as a company, we needed to harness this vitality and drive change."

As a result of these insights a programme was commissioned that would address the important areas. Although Cornwall knew that the culture development programme was a completely different approach to training than the staff had experienced before, he recognised that truly motivated employees could learn to choose their attitude and change the way

behaviours that do not allow such performance to occur, then it is bound to fail."

In other words, if people are constantly waiting for managers to tell them what to do then the decision-making process will be slow and the final service or manufacturing experience will be inefficient. "People will become frustrated and cynical," Reeve says, "because they will feel that they are being blocked from above. But if managers show real leadership, give people a chance to show their expertise, invite them to bring in their energy and support them when they do so – then you have a completely different scenario."

This focus on building a culture – rather than a cult – of leadership, is one that Reeve believes has to occur if companies are to change. In the future, we will all be asked to display our leadership capacity at work.

### Ketchup with the front runner

Reeve offers a story that highlights how important self-leadership is. "At the end of a particularly stressful day, I went on a run round the streets where I live. I didn't feel like doing it, but I put on my running shoes anyway because I knew I would feel better for it

## "The process of asking our people what they wanted, and listening to their answers, was really important."

recognised that by establishing best practices in managing, leading and coaching we would be able to transform the culture to help us to maximise our performance."

It's easy to say "we want to change things". But how is the process implemented? As with any type of change initiative, the first step is to examine the existing situation. Heinz worked with culture change consultancy R&A who ran specially designed brainstorm sessions at all management levels within the sales division. These sessions gathered information on employees' perceptions of what it was like to

they thought about work. This would not only give them a greater sense of purpose and benefit the business but would also positively impact their lives outside of work.

But the change initiative was not an airy-fairy, "let's get something done – tomorrow", exercise. In fact, the business logic behind the initiative was compelling. "In most organisations, it is relatively straightforward to see why results are not being achieved," declares R&A managing director, Colin Reeve. "It's all to do with alignment. If a company wants high performance but has in place structures or

afterwards. As I was jogging, and feeling like slowing down, I passed a woman in the street who said 'You make it look so effortless.' Immediately, I had a sudden surge of energy from somewhere. I ran better, and faster. I was back home much more quickly than normal. And I felt good about it."

It's the simplest management rule – show a bit of encouragement and the employee will do better. Often all the worker needs is a pat on the back and he or she will feel more motivated, work harder and feel more satisfied at the end of the day, ready to do it all again the next day.

But so often in business, this pat on the back is never given. Instead managers drive their workforce harder and faster – at least, they think they’re driving them harder and faster but in fact they’re slowing them down. When Colin Reeve was out on his run, all it took was a friendly woman saying the right thing at a moment when he was flagging to remind him of his potential. It was only a brief comment that cost

work with us to create meaning, and who help us make our work purposeful.

### Easier with Heinz sight

Paradoxically, one of the main obstacles that people face when trying to get inspired is their own beliefs. Ray Cornwall explains, “At Heinz, when people started looking at the causes of their current situation, they bumped up against

sales for Heinz, confirms that from his perspective the training has been hitting home. “I divide training into two elements – attitudinal training and skills-based training. What this programme has given us on the attitudinal side has been superb. It has helped people to see that it is up to them to create their own destiny.”

And the training has challenged people. “Under the umbrella of

“The energy and endeavour that people bring to work can be completely misdirected.”

her nothing – but it did have to be given, and it did have to come at the right time.

This distinctive view of leadership is echoed by several prominent business thinkers. Leadership guru Stephen Covey talks powerfully about the overlaps between personal and interpersonal leadership. Jack Weber, Professor of Management at the University of Virginia, suggests that real leadership only reveals itself in the inspired action of others. And Margaret Wheatley says we instinctively reach out to leaders who

their limiting beliefs. These were expressed in terms like ‘we’ve tried all this before,’ ‘it’ll never work’ and ‘it’s not the way we do things here.’ It took the programme to make them realise that such beliefs actually hold them back – and that they have been induced by the management, or by the employee’s perception of the management. When people recognised that they really are responsible for their own attitude, something clicks and it makes a sudden, massive difference.”

David Huse, vice president of

performance management it is certainly making a valuable contribution,” Huse asserts. “In the past the sales division used to be characterised by silo mentality and people looking after themselves. This culture has been completely transformed.”

### Bean doing well

According to Ray Cornwall, the feedback indicates that the culture change programme is making a discernable business impact. “We conducted a survey after the →

## Business alignment is key

What do we mean when we use a word like alignment? For Heinz, it means understanding that if the company says one thing and is seen to be doing another, then it will damage morale, customer relationships and business performance.

Heinz and Colin Reeve of R&A worked together to ensure that the company was consistent in setting out and establishing its strategy. In brief, the leadership aspirations came out as follows:

- The vision: “to improve the well-being of families everywhere”.
- The mission: “to provide good food every day”.
- The beliefs: “what we eat affects our health”; “our brands and our people are our most important assets” and “we will deliver superior business returns”.

But such high-level pronouncements have to

be backed up on the ground. And the team recognised that management follow-through would be required at the following levels to achieve their desired high performance:

- The imperatives: a commitment to skills and strategies that will focus staff on quality, effectiveness and innovation.
- The behaviours: leadership at every level.
- The environment: providing staff with the most appropriate tools and resources to allow them to perform at their best.

Colin Reeve is at pains to point out that if any of these levels are out of alignment, “the energy and endeavour that people bring to work can be completely misdirected.” But when they are all satisfactorily aligned, “a company can make astounding breakthroughs in performance. That is what we have started to see at Heinz”.

## Five characteristics of healthy high performance

- Clear, encouraging and engaging leaders.
- Self-leading, motivated staff.
- Teams which enjoy great relationships.
- A discernible sense of purpose and passion.
- A positive and creative working environment.

→ programme had first been delivered to ensure that the changes that we predicted were indeed occurring,” he says. “Especially encouraging was the finding that 85 per cent of the executive team had noticed positive changes in their staff. As for the training itself, one delegate said he’d never seen a course make so much difference. Another commented that after the course had ended he’d never seen so much team spirit and unity.”

These are the kind of observations and experiences that indicate a major culture shift. And for Cornwall, there is no doubt that the training

has been responsible for some tangible business gains. Improvements in staff morale and a low staff turnover have more than paid for the programme. “However, we need to keep reinforcing the messages of the programme in order to maintain our momentum.” For Cornwall, that is the next challenge – for Heinz to keep moving forward. There are more than 57 varieties of employee – and more than 57 ways to motivate them to greater things. ■

### Resources

Robert Dilts (2003), *From Coach to Awakener*, Meta Publications.

Robert Dilts, Tim Hallbom and Suzi Smith (1990), *Beliefs: Pathways to Health and Wellbeing*, Metamorphous Press.

Colin Reeve (2003), *The Way of Artistry & Grace*, Palladian Press.

Stephen Covey (1993), *Principle Centered Leadership*, Simon & Schuster.

Margaret Wheatley (2001), *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Berrett-Koehler.

Margaret Wheatley (2005), *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, Berrett-Koehler.

**Anthony Landale** (alandale@evenlode.u-net.com) writes about business drivers, leadership expectations and the ambition of individuals to satisfy their own career and life needs. He is the editor of the *Gower Handbook of Training & Development*, the author of *The Fast Facilitator* and was the editor of *People Performance* magazine.