

October 30, 2006

Ever wonder what the true source of your competitive advantage might be? Is it your technology? Is it your product or service? Is it your price?

It is a proven fact that your competitive advantage lies in none of these - it lies in your people! I hope you enjoy the following excerpt of an article I recently read that will give you some... Food for Thought!

People Come First

Excerpt of an article by Dr. Ben S. Graham, Jr.

Have you ever wondered how you and others are able to remember the lyrics of so many songs. The hooks that get us to the words are in the tune and the rhythm. Once the song starts the words simply come forth. Likewise, people in all lines of work, from file clerks to neurosurgeons, develop intuitive skills that enable them to come up with what they need when they need it. Here is an example of a set of these skills and how they are gained.

A young man drops out of high school at age sixteen or seventeen. He loves driving a car, gets work as a cab driver and stays with it. Now we pick him up at age thirty. He has been driving in the same city for thirteen or fourteen years. He has learned the streets of his city by driving them. He knows thousands of streets. He knows them by name and he can see them as well. He carries in his head pictures of buildings, trees, signs, intersections, etc. In addition he knows the timing of the lights on most of the major streets. As he is driving he knows just when he needs to speed up a bit to make a light. And, this is not a matter of conscious, logical calculation. The information about the streets comes to him as he needs it just as the words of a song.

The cab driver also knows the driving patterns around the hotels, throughout the entertainment areas, the airport, the hospitals. He knows the timing of different areas of traffic congestion. He knows where the difficult intersections are. He even knows pot holes. And, this man is certainly not the epitome of knowledge or education in our society. He is a cab driver with a limited education and a good mind who has developed intuitive skills that permit him to, literally, sing the song of his city.

The message behind this discussion is that we have people throughout our organizations who have knowledge equivalent to the knowledge of a city. They work in the inventory department, in customer relations, in product design, etc. and these are the operating people whose common sense belongs in our marvelous new systems. They should not be discarded as an unnecessary expense. They are, as they have been, the most valuable resource in the organization and when treated as such they can provide an organization with a force for excellence that goes far beyond our techniques, marvelous as they may be.

Our challenge is to advance our organizations brilliantly and simultaneously to incorporate the intuitive wisdom of our people. Improvement comes from the people

who are at the grass roots of the organization and in direct and continuous contact with our operations systems. If we support the intuitive genius of our people, we will see delightful improvements in workflow. The challenge is to trust your workforce.

This message has been about people... People come first.

***"The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas."
- Dr. Linus Pauling***