

What They Know That We Don't Know: Peeping Into the Corporate World

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Abstract:

In this diary entry, Laura Reasoner Jones thinks about how workers prepare for the job as her daughter takes a medical sales position: "It was very clear from the short glimpse I had of her training plan that this company will not let its sale force out into the world until they know how to sell the product."

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Full Text:

What They Know That We Don't Know:

Peeping into the Corporate World

Recently I have had little glimpses of corporate culture through family members and I like what I saw. Now, this does not mean that I feel schools should be run like businesses. But two specific pieces of the corporate way of doing things have shown me that schools have a long way to go in encouraging good professional development, i.e., developing the professionals.

Incident number one:

As I have mentioned several times, my older daughter Christiana, 25, has a new sales job with one of the largest and most successful Fortune 500 companies (think light bulbs). When she came home before her four months of salary plus all-expenses-paid training, she showed me her itinerary and training notebooks. Every minute of every day for the next four months was laid out in detail-areas to be covered, meetings to attend, presentations to prepare, and mentors to meet with. These people really know how to do it right.

It was very clear from the short glimpse I had of her training plan that this company will not let its sale force out into the world until they know how to sell the product. There is none of this extra-week-in-the-summer and in-services-after-work-hours about her training plan — no, she was immersed in the culture from Day One and shown how to succeed.

The expectations of her work during this training period were also made very clear: she had to attend and participate in every single session, prepare and be critiqued on twelve different sales presentations, and work closely with four different mentors. She had constant phone and email contact with these mentors and multiple site visits to watch them work. And she was expected to report to her main sales mentor at the training site what she had learned from these mentors and how she would use what she had learned. There was accountability on both sides of the equation: the company would provide in-depth training and support, and Christie would give everything she had to the training.

Incident number two:

My wonderful husband works for a rapidly-growing company that builds and operates 80-250 acre retirement communities all over the United States. His company has about 8000 employees, smaller by far than my school system with its 21,000 employees. However, last week he had his annual meeting with his supervisor about his future. This meeting was specifically designed for him to talk about how he perceives his future with the company, and is unrelated to the performance evaluation done in January.

Each spring, every director in his company sits down with each of her/his employees and asks, "Where do you see yourself in the next five years?" They talk about possibilities for growth or movement within the corporation, or just how to improve skills. My husband was able to discuss his dreams and the director was able to present opportunities for personal and professional development inside and outside of the company.

What if we saw both of these corporate ideas implemented more in school systems?

Imagine if teacher inductions were as organized and as in-depth as in Christie's corporation's training. Think back to when you were a first-year teacher, fresh out of college and student-teaching. Chances are your student-teaching experience bore little or no resemblance to the school situation you are in now, because you student-taught in a school near your college, or you moved back home to work, or you moved to the city where your boyfriend or girlfriend lived. As you started your new job, you got your class assignment, had a few days before the kids came to prepare, and the year started. You were off and running, expected to do what the other teachers did and you had little or no help. You were just as responsible for the students' learning as the master teacher next door, and you had the same 7.5 hours a day to do it.

Yes, you had a mentor, but she had her own class, and maybe she was having a tough year personally, or she was in another building, or he was in a doctoral program, and just was not available for you. Every first-year teacher is on her or his own, no matter what the administrative offices say. And the first three years of any job, including teaching, are the absolute roughest. Is it any wonder that teacher retention is becoming a major problem?

Imagine if professional growth within the school system was encouraged and valued.

Imagine a job in which you could sit down with someone in the school system who was aware of the big picture — who knew what kinds of growth the school system was planning. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be seen as an asset to be nurtured and developed, rather than as a body to fill a slot?

I look back on my own career and the changes I have made in the last few years. My personal thoughts of possible change came as a result of achieving National Board Certification. Completing that process made me see myself differently and made me want to contribute in a different way. But there was no opportunity available for me to process those thoughts with anyone else. I was odd, someone to be a little worried about.

When the chance came to go to the National Board and work for two years as a Teacher in Residence, I jumped at it. And that job did give me different ways to contribute, to my own life and skill set, and to the general body of education resources available to teachers.

But when I came back, no one said, "How can we use what you have learned?" or "How can you use what you have learned?" I wouldn't even have cared if they had said, in a purely economic sense, "We paid for you to work there for two years — you owe us." It isn't that I was ignored; it was that what I had learned was ignored. And I felt very frustrated. So I looked and looked for another line of work within the system until I found the new technology job I currently have. And that was one of the most gratifying things in the interview I had for the new job I have taken. The people I work now for actually saw that I had a great deal to offer, and were willing to let me work in a new and different capacity.

Teaching is viewed correctly by many young people at this time as a no-growth profession. But that perception could easily change if school systems saw their teachers and other personnel as people who have multiple skills and talents to offer. Many teachers would like to know how to grow within the education field, but are not sure how to go about it. Many teachers could use help to develop paths of professional change, and would welcome guidance.

Christie talks all the time about how she has to "grow her business." Well, we in the schools should start thinking about "growing our own" also, or we will lose the best ones coming in, as well as some of the best we already have.