

## In Search of Honor

### Are You Looking for Greatness in Your Employees?

By  
Adele B. Lynn

We know that we should have a vision for our company. The vision statement should reflect the “picture” we see of our company’s future. We know that the vision isn’t necessarily reality yet, but it is the reality of the future that we must keep in our mind’s eye so we can accomplish great things. We also know that our vision should be positive. A doom and gloom picture of our company’s future, touted as the company vision, wouldn’t serve very well to motivate inspired performance.

Yet, how many times do you have nagging doubts and negative visions of your employees? Do you see your team as seriously lacking? Do you secretly wonder if any of them are really capable? Or do you see your team as superstars – capable and inspired? Your vision of your staff is critically important to their success. Why? People respond to your vision or expectations. They live up to your beliefs.

The renowned educator, Harry K. Wong, quips “Why did I succeed? Because by the time I was five, my parents were asking me what kind of a doctor I was going to become.” That kind of positive prophecy is powerful. In fact, a recent study of the top 5 factors leading to success of students, ranked positive prophecy on the part of parents as most important.

The same thinking applies to employees. In the workplace, we have seen many instances where employees rise to the greatness that we see in them. In fact, most people who have had a mentor, report that their mentors believed strongly in them and their ability to perform. Although the mentor may have at times been critical, the underlying belief was positive.

On the contrary, we know that if we believe our workers are brainless, we see workers who do not think. If we believe our workers are lazy, we see workers who show no initiative. If we believe our workers are not imaginative or creative, we see workers without imagination.

Contrary and critical thinking, however, may have proved very fruitful to our careers. As supervisors or managers, we have probably been promoted because we are able to look at a situation and determine what's wrong with it. Continuous improvement efforts require us to diligently assess and improve. We have been taught and rewarded for developing a critical eye. For some, however, the same critical eye that works well for us in improving workplace procedures and practices, could result in negative visions of our employees. We are always looking at what's wrong with them, rather than what's right with them.

Critical thinking may serve as both a blessing and a beast. On one hand, it helps us improve our performance and the performance of others. Yet, on the other hand, if we are not careful, it can send negative messages to our employees and even to ourselves. If we find ourselves going home every night dissatisfied with the day's accomplishments, dissatisfied with our own accomplishments, and dissatisfied with the accomplishments of our people, we may be suffering from critical thinking gone amuck.

Admittedly, some people just cannot or will not perform the job. However, sometimes, our "performance problems" reflect our vision of the person performing the job. We have no vision of his success, only a vision that he can't or won't succeed. The only voice we can hear is our critical voice. So, before you conclude that you have a "performance problem," assess the following:

1. What is your vision of this person? Do you think this person is capable of achieving more? Have you ever thought differently about this person's performance?
2. What do you believe this person is capable of achieving? Have you ever been surprised by this person's performance?
3. What is your vision of other employees in your work unit? Typically, is it easier for you to have a negative vision of employees or a positive vision of employees?
4. Has anyone else in the organization had a more positive vision of this employee? When? Under what circumstances?
5. What training has the person received? Has the person been mentored?
6. Where could you envision this person succeeding?
7. What are the person's strengths? How can his/her strengths be used to help him/her in this situation?

If we change our perspective and look for greatness, we may very well begin to see it. I'm not suggesting that we ignore performance problems. However, before we place that label, I would urge you first to examine your perspective. You will not get inspired performance if you don't expect it. So before you label, ask first, "What greatness do I see in my employees?"

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In Search of Honor is a regular column written by Adele B. Lynn. Adele is a speaker, author and trainer. Her new book *In Search of Honor – Lessons from Workers on How to Build Trust* (BajonHouse Publishing) ISBN 0-9664084-4-6 was released in September. Comments can be addressed to Adele Lynn, Lynn Learning Labs, 609 Broad Ave. Belle Vernon, PA 15012, 724 929-5352 or e-mail, [lynnlabs@westol.com](mailto:lynnlabs@westol.com).

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