

STAMPING OUT CORPORATE DANDELIONS

I'm from Kansas, and we spend a lot of time pruning and stamping out a noxious weed from our lawns called the dandelion. The Midwest has that black, fertile soil, plenty of rain and sunshine so the little buggers actually can spring up overnight. If you ignore them, dandelions will take over your entire lawn within a matter of days. The roots can be four feet long and impossible to pull if you let them grow. And within a few days, the pretty yellow flowers turn into clusters of little seed-pod parachutes, that carry the seeds to far destinations--all over your yard, to your neighbor's yard and into the next county.

Corporate politics is a lot like the dreaded dandelion. Politics is the biggest killer of innovation and creativity in business—political “weeds” that can take root in the company overnight. Politics bring about decreased productivity, lack of innovation, lost opportunity, wasted time and money and can cause a lot more problems that you can't actually see.

How can we effectively rid ourselves of the dandelions? What we want is thick, green turf—the turf can be compared to growth, money, vibrancy, creativity, innovation, success, excellent long-term employees, increased market share—all the good stuff a company wants to have!

There are several ways to go about getting rid of dandelions in a lawn. All are chemical solutions that are possibly harmful to the soil and the air. But what's the best way? You can build a green, luxuriant turf that is so thick, dandelion seeds can't get to the soil beneath to gain a foothold in the lawn. This can be accomplished with several different kinds of turf—fescue and zoysia are two examples. Both types of grass create a root network both above and beneath the soil that leaves a carpet of lawn that is impenetrable to weeds.

In a company, the best way to get rid of political “dandelions” is to create a thick network of positive employee reinforcement where politicians don't feel comfortable, so they either don't join the company or, if they find themselves hired, they leave on their own. This is far healthier for both the company and its employees than if these individuals are left to create havoc in the organization and must be “weeded out”. Or worse yet, they are allowed to stay and they spread their little political seed pods around and their political games start to take hold.

Why do people engage in political behavior? It happens because the environment they are in is disempowering. Usually they are in a company where they have absolutely no input into the strategy and overall management—all decisions are made by senior management and handed down to staff. In order to take back their sense of power and control, they try and manipulate the environment so they have some control. If they see that promotions are made not on merit, but on political connections, they will try their best to develop

connections of their own. This often involves making their colleagues look bad, or changing their behavior to match that of an executive who practices politics. And so the games begin. And the biggest loser is the company itself, as it is deprived by team members spending their time and energy on these games rather than on doing their jobs.

How does a company create an environment that discourages politics and encourages meaningful work? Just like the dandelion patch, you must create an environment where politics won't flourish.

One way is by adopting a "People Strategy" that puts the needs of people first. By investing in team members' personal development, companies can reap big returns in increased productivity and profit.

The elements of a successful People Strategy are:

- Team members learn common, self-coaching techniques
- Teams learn team alignment techniques
- Everyone participates, not just management
- The strategy is woven into the vision, mission and business strategy of the company
- It is on-going
- It is flexible enough to provide the foundation and infrastructure for all company initiatives
- Managers are evaluated as to how well they implement the people strategy and how they demonstrate the principles in day-to-day management
- Rewards for innovative ideas are built into the compensation structure for all executive and team members

Embarking on a People Strategy can bring big rewards for the company by teaching everyone common techniques for creativity and innovation, goal creation, goal achievement, personal motivation, group motivation, personal alignment, and group alignment.