Foreword

by David W. Robertson

An old client of mine who was a senior level manager of a large US based textile manufacturer located in Southwest Virginia (now out of business) used to jokingly say “…one day all that would be left inside his plant would be one person and a dog. The dog’s job would be to guard the single remaining person to make sure that he or she did not get in the way of the computerized machines and robots that were doing all the work.” Since I heard this statement almost two decades ago, I have witnessed, as both a business owner and salesperson, the impact technology has played within corporate America. There is no denying the fact that technology has, and will continue to be, the principle driver that fundamentally changes how businesses operate in this country as well as abroad. However, despite our need for continued investments in new technologies (i.e., competitiveness, efficiency, profitability, etc), there appears to be a growing disconnect with how we view workers in this transition to an information-based, knowledge-centered workplace. Sadly, it seems, like the comment made by my old customer, workers are all too often viewed as impediments to organizational progress versus a necessary ingredient to its success. It could be argued that there is a shrinking place for many of our workers in this 21st century, technology-obsessed environment. There is a partially misguided notion that technology is the main, if not only, ingredient required to solve the problems of the workplace. The reality is that people play an essential role in how technology is implemented and ultimately used to achieve positive organizational results.

There are some critical elements required for organizational success, which helps provide workers with the tools they need to contribute at maximum capacity to the goals and objectives of their employers. First, effective leadership is a must, as organizations require clear direction and follow through of their mission. Today’s workplace is comprised of multigenerational workers from diverse backgrounds, thus sound leadership at every level becomes a game changer for the organizations that thrive versus those that struggle. Next, clear communication and sincere (side note: I emphasize sincere as many organizations give only lip service to this concept and instead desire to put in place excessive policies and controls thereby limiting independent decision-making) worker empowerment provide workers with the ability to harness the synergistic power of effective teamwork required to deliver the results in our competitive society. Finally, in order for workers to succeed in their roles, organizations have to place a premium on continuous training. Technologies change extremely rapidly as we all know, and the associated expense required to integrate new solutions and processes is high. Thus, not providing the appropriate employee training is tantamount to corporate negligence. In other words, it sets up the worker, and thereby the organization, for failure. Proper training, while time intensive and expensive, ultimately provides the best return on investment for new technologies.
In her new, thought-provoking book, Dr. Hughes provides an intriguing paradigm shift from which to view the relationship between workers and technology. She makes a compelling argument that these two entities are not mutually exclusive from one another and that workers themselves should be valued as much as technology. Additionally, she provides a functional model which serves as a guide to how organizations can work to achieve amazing results while at the same time providing their workers with meaningful training, enhanced skills, and ultimately increased motivation. As a business owner with over 22 years of experience, I know firsthand the importance of being competitive and the ever present need for continuous technological enhancements to remain viable in the marketplace. This book challenges conventional wisdom and provides a roadmap which we all can follow to make our organizations stronger.

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