

The importance of a challenging work environment

 By [Greg Forbes](#)

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The work environment is an often fast-paced, dynamic and challenging one - especially true for those working within the marketing communications industry that requires constant creativity, analytical thinking, perfectionism and adherence to tight deadlines.

Given the erratic nature of the economy, which on a daily basis directs the marketing and communications industry, both employers and employees are faced with the challenge of having to constantly adapt to meet challenges head-on, and to carve out new ways of working.

The annual staff turnover across all industries in South Africa is estimated to be well over 5 million per year, according to StatsSA. Millions are leaving their jobs every year for various reasons, and an ever-growing global trend is for employees to change their careers between three to seven times in their lifetime. It is not surprising that psychologytoday.com, listed "You're not challenged" as the second highest reason for an employee to leave a position. In first place, and possibly significantly true for our industry is, " You have a truly evil boss".

Always learning

For new and existing employees, the work environment is a classroom in which they are always learning about themselves and their chosen field of work. Ours is an industry that is influenced by constant change in the economic, social, political and technological arenas. Ours is also one where the skills we learned last year may be outdated by next year, and so we are always learning to ensure we remain relevant - just one more pressure for an already stressed employee.

In addition, as employees spend the majority of their day at work, it is imperative that they leave the office knowing that they have made a positive and worthwhile contribution to the business, to their clients, and also to their own personal development.

Simply put, an employee's happiness is in large part based on whether the said employee has been able to grow in their work environment, and has a regularly confirmed self-perceived sense of accomplishment and growth. If this is the case then this advances them personally as well as professionally.

A place where people spend most of their day should be one where they're given the space to question, learn and be able to openly discuss certain aspects of their work with management without fear.

Discovering your potential

People have the potential to do more than they know and it is not until they enter the working world that many slowly begin to discover that. An employee that recognises the value of a challenge, and experiences the personal and professional growth through overcoming the challenge, is an employee that will develop a positive and realistic self-worth, as well as an understanding that personal achievement and business achievement are inextricably linked.

As important as a challenging work environment may be, it is also important for employers to provide a support structure within the company to help employees in any way possible. The development of the skills within the workspace must be accompanied by a support system that ensures that employees are gaining knowledge from any extra tasks they may be doing.

Working closely with individuals to help identify areas in which they feel they need to improve is important. All jobs have criteria that have to be met by the employee when they are first hired. From this, employers are able to assess the initial state of the employee's strengths and weaknesses, and are thus able to focus mainly on areas that need attention.

Multi-skilled positions become the norm

In addition, multi-skilled positions are becoming the norm within our industry, and employees that demonstrate the potential for multi-skills positions must be supported to develop these skills - this in itself being a personal and professional challenge.

The benefits are obvious; the employer has an employee that is far more valuable than before, and the employee grows in terms of skills as well as positive self-perception. The business is able to manage resource costs more closely, while the employee enjoys higher degrees of job security.

More than ever, employees are balancing the need for approval from their employers against the approval of themselves. By showing a willingness to assist and support employees within the work environment, employers are in turn ensuring that they receive a higher quality of work and a greater degree of dedication to the position as well as the business.

Employees need assurance

And while employees want to be reassured and told when they are improving or doing well, equally they are expecting to be given greater opportunities to grow themselves. By showing an employee where they need to be developing to get to where you know they can be, will boost their confidence in you and in themselves. Employers and employees should not be afraid of challenging work environments, as long as the challenges are realistic and present opportunities for mutual growth.

Just like school, work is an institution where people are taught. Challenges at work are there to show people that they are capable and with the correct support structure, obstacles become less daunting and more exciting for employees.

ABOUT GREG FORBES

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