

Action Learning Team #1

Improving the Ability of USGS Managers to Engage and Lead Employees

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Recommendations

Our commitment is to improve the ability of USGS managers to engage and lead employees within our circles of influence. We know the ELT shares the concern with us and are committed to implementing many of our recommendations. Just imagine if these efforts permeate through all USGS and where every employee from those who bring in stones, plow the parking lots, pay the bills, to those who conduct the science can see themselves as part of the whole.

1. Developing the Relationships

Surveys from the Corporate Leadership Council and our own observations indicate that engaged employees perform better and are happier. We believe that solid relationships are the foundation of any great agency. We can develop great relationships and engage employees by finding and acknowledging employees' passions and helping them see themselves in the future direction of the agency and to allow them to help guide the direction of the agency. We do this by developing trust, tapping into the passion for our work and encouraging honest, open and safe communication in a variety of ways including (more details provided in Appendix A):

- Build trust
 - Social events at the local level
 - Let the staff get to know the ELT and Directorate on a more personal, informal basis so that our leaders are not a bunch of “thems”. We recognize that we are all “thems” to someone in this organization.
- Engage employees passion
 - Ask them about themselves
 - Show them how they contribute to the agency mission
 - Help them realize how they benefit from the connection
- Practice open and safe communication
 - Provide training

2. Training

Training sets the table and provides the tools to establish the relationships and tap into employee creativity and passion. Training allows us to create a receptive environment for change and a culture of safe and effective communication.

- Maintain Leadership 101 and 201 training
- Increase the number of Leadership Intensive courses
- Commit to having every employee become part of a Leadership Intensive within X years.
- Develop and train managers at all levels based on the Core Competency Model
- Transform managers into leaders
- Train and mentor employees for the future at all levels

3. Connecting the dots

We as leaders need to develop a culture wherein every individual sees themselves as part of the whole. We need to use appreciative inquiry, creativity, and feedback in collaboration with our staff to articulate how our work furthers the mission of USGS in terms of ourselves, our partners, and the public.

- Make connecting the dots part of everything we do.
 - Provide information on how and why details are made showing the benefits to the employee and to USGS
 - Clarify how a project fits into a Center's mission and how that rolls up to the greater USGS and society.
 - Don't simply justify what you are doing – make a real connection or make a change.
- Take action on employee suggestions.
- Complete the circle - communicate progress on changes made as a result of feedback and ask again – how did this effect you? Provide and accept feedback on implementation and action. Learn from actions.
- Show how basic research fits into the mission
- Take the time and summon the energy to use the feedback to inform us as to whether or not we have adequately communicated information or ideas.

4. Communications strategies

Engaging and leading employees requires constant attention to communication; develop good communication skills and use a variety of forms for communication. Everyone takes personal responsibility to communicate in a safe, constructive, and positive way.

Top down

- Communication travels at the speed of emails so we need to deliver information in a timely fashion. Just as our public/customers need our data in real time, our employees need internal communications in real time.
- Communicate in a variety of forms recognizing that people hear and respond to different methods

- Fireside chats
- Pod casts
- Web cast
- Email
- Face to face/one on one
- Set clear expectations for employees and managers
 - Give timelines for policy implementation
 - Make sure employees know what their and other's roles are
- Grieve and let go – use appreciative inquiry and positive communication
 - Everyone commits to being part of a solution
- Develop internal USGS team, including a cross-section of staff, to develop a communication plan.
- Before a new OAS is conducted, summarize actions taken from previous surveys
- Provide regular feedback on changes made and ask employees if they can see the change
 - Monthly Q & A's

Bottom up

- Take personal responsibility for change
- Field go to Regional Office and give seminars/feedback/energy
- Share ideas and solutions
- Take charge of your destiny by reading your communications
- Use stories to empower yourselves

5. Leadership strategies

Leadership is about taking personal responsibility for making things better and recognizing that it is not about being in charge. We each are committed to applying these solutions at our offices.

- Transform all managers and staff into leaders – establish leadership at all levels
 - Training
 - ELT attends leadership training together
- Lead by example
- Coach and support staff through changes – don't just announce them
 - Put change into context
 - Shadows and mentors
- Empower employees

6. Management strategies

Sound management is critical to engagement of employees. The managers establish the relationships, and help make the connections between mission and actions by: involving staff, holding staff and themselves accountable, balancing workloads, and understanding and supporting higher level decisions.

- USGS should establish a team to benchmark the difference between USGS and the top 10 agencies in relation to employees satisfaction with management
- Strive for accountability and swift action
- Involve staff in highly charged issues
- Make sure good managers in place
- Strive for balanced workloads
- Recruit and train the right people
 - Include interpersonal skills and high motivation as a factor in hiring all positions

7. Rewards and recognition

Rewards and recognition are important in making employees feel regarded and valued, part of something. It encourages employees and strengthens relationships.

We can also encourage innovation and risk taking by expanding the Venture Capital idea to every Center (redirected dollars) wherein scientists can compete at the local level for funding to test new ideas.

- Simple, individual rewards/recognition – there are many forms. The key is to do it.
- Managers use discretionary dollars or find/ reprogram annual dollars to fund ventures at their Centers (to elevate the emphasis on innovation and risk taking).

Appendix A. Detailed Listings of Ideas

Developing relationships

- Build trust
- Be honest & direct up front; don't gloss over; give facts
- Insist on respectful behavior
- Engage their passion
- Turn 'em on!
- Find employees "on" switch
- Respect employees as individuals – they-re not all the same; get to know them;
- No back end runs say it if you feel. Send folks back to level of problem first
- Social event to strengthen relationships
- Informal setting interaction – BEER!
- Interject fun into the workplace – happy hours; movies
- Employees evaluate supervisor; 360 feedback for 2-way communication

- Use the 360 process more widely as a means for employees to give feedback to evaluate supervisor
- Support and coaching are important in any 360 process
- Develop a connection between leadership and science so that people value management and managers are not considered idiots
- Do we know what management should be doing at each level? Do people believe in it?
- Get to know the projects and tasks of employees
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Training

- Maintain L101 & L201
- Increase number of Leadership Intensive courses
- Develop and train managers at all levels based on Core Competency Model
- Teamwork and conflict resolution series
- Provide training on teamwork and meeting processes
- Train for the future – Mentor for the future
- Educate employees re: social network and storytelling

Connecting the dots...

- Take programs out of disciplines – polarity issues
- Have regional national staff serve on center efforts and committees
- Show how base research fits into missions learn from the past successes and apply
- Emphasize collaboration with outside organizations – expand intellectual capability and relevance
- Provide details on whom and how decisions were made
- Show benefits of the decisions
- Communicate progress on follow through
- Monthly management actions linking accountability to employees
- Take corrective actions on employee suggestions and follow up with what you did and ask for feedback
- Provide feed back on actions from OAS
- Make leadership training a priority; if leadership is a priority and a cultural shift then commit to rolling through all employees in X time. In private industry if they wanted to make a shift they embraced it, set a timeline and did it; At a Center it was a priority and the CD held classes for all staff.
- No lip service to GPRA
- In trying to engage and lead employees include benefit to employee, to USGS, and relevance to society
- Management makes concerted effort to link field project to USGS goals
- Relate all projects to mission
- Work on link between program and project
- Connect the dots constantly between program and project

- Have staff contribute to center web pages that connect the dots of their work to organizational goals

Communication Strategies

Top Down

- Explore new avenues of communication
- Use technical avenues for communication
- Web ex
- Cyber seminars
- Streaming video
- Success stories
- CD's
- Use CD for success stories – distribute to cost centers
- Communicate projected time frame for policy implementation
- Realistic performance expectations
- Ensure that employees know what others are doing
- Provide information in a variety of forms
- Use pod-casts to communicate quickly
- Practice positive communication
- Appreciative inquire – 5 why's and 1 how
- Before new OAS is distributed summarize actions taken on changes made based on previous results
- Everyone is part of the problem and therefore part of the solution
- Team to define internal communication plan with good cross section of staff – both vertical and horizontal
- Already an annual managers conference on administrations; let's add an annual managers conference on strategy and planning
- Face to face fireside chats
- Town hall meetings to open communication
- Upper leaders visit field regularly – Open panel to field questions
- Have regular, routine all hands meeting
- Regular feedback to employees on enterprise efforts
- Monthly answer employee's questions with help from employees; open answers; review of actions;
- As changes are made, ask employees for feedback on resulting impact
- Grieve and let go; no whining; only whine once
- Process of Announcement – email; cyber; visits

Bottom Up

- Employee led exploration of issues or tasks – personal responsibility
- Field go to regional offices and give seminars

- Get ideas from employees
- If you have a complaint be party of the solutions
- Take charge of our own destiny. Become a voice
- Employees take charge by reading emails and minute notes
- Ask for rank and file input on engagement preferences
- Brown bag seminars – employees decide what topics will be selected
- Use stories to engage the power of one or a few – ask for stories

Leadership Strategies

- Lead by example
- ELT attend leadership training together and take L201 action learning projects from employees
- Don't talk the talk; walk the walk;
- Bullring through the nose for some decisions – take a stand!
- Coach people around decisions and implementation strategies
- Coach and report status of changes; don't just announce them
- Empower employees to make difficult decisions
- Don't be afraid to challenge employees and let them fail
- Support them in the future
- Take Pride in Your Work – self recognition and have enthusiastic manager who is enthusiastic about work
- Have short term shadowing assignments
- What can “I” do in my job to benefit and make a difference? What works for me and other managers?
- Use the social network we have to energize others in implementing our recommended changes (Action Learning Scenario teams and L201 graduates)
- Balance engagement with work excellence
- Focus on areas and levels of influence

Management Strategies

- Swift action with problem performance and behavior
- Take accountability – Give time frames for projects and stick with them
- Compare management candidates to management competencies required
- Benchmark differences between USGS and Top 10 agencies for best government agencies to work in
- Ensure workloads are balanced
- Prioritize and don't overload the system. Push back! Don't overload our employees either. Prioritize for excellence.
- Give the employees the time and space to think and reflect
- Involve staff in the A-76 and other charged issues
- Recruit proper people into management rather than putting good scientists to do it
- When we hire anyone, consider interpersonal skills in the hiring process

- Recruit highly motivated employees
- Rotate employees involved in management and regional/ national committees
- Form USGS study team to build upon the 1 week 201 action learning scenarios and other input on big issues and dilemmas
- Center-based innovation funding

Rewards & Recognition

- Reward risk and fund ideas
- Reward junior employees demonstrating leadership (Leading from any Chair Award)
- Demonstrate successes
- Pass on more Leadership Coins
- Reward management transition for career ladder commitment
- Give incentives
- Re-think rewarding environment
- Public recognition & accomplishments
- Promote and support importance of leadership and management