



Entering the Participation Age

The best resource for building a great company

is your employees. That's the belief of the Participation Age. Recovering from Frederick Winslow Taylor's huge impact on the American worker – the Scientific Method which reduced employees to machines to produce greater efficiency on the factory floor – the Participation Age embraces knowledge workers and acknowledges that all workers have knowledge.

The Industrial Age, (Taylor and his colleagues) sucked the life out of the American Worker. It was a time based system, asking only for brawn and no brain and the willingness to “work for the man.” That was true for the factory floor, as well mid-managers who became “paper pushers” devoid of engagement and responsibility.

Enter the Participation Age, a time when employees become stakeholders and leadership is evident at every level within an organization.

How can companies make the transition, or transformation, to the Participation Age?

1.) Change Happens at the Top:

Leaders at the top must believe in the ability of employees to be self-motivated and self-managed. They

must believe that employees can be responsible for results and outcomes and that employees are capable of accountability and understanding the consequences of their actions, both good and bad. There must be a deep belief in the ability of people, at all levels, to operate at the best of their abilities. Without these deeply held beliefs, the culture will not change.

2.) Go Slow so You Can Get There Fast:

This is an old cowboy saying that best illustrates how to integrate the transformation to the Participation Age. Key elements to change are how the Stakeholders are measured, who leads, the rewards for good results and the consequences for not performing. By going slow and proceeding carefully with getting the right strategies, the right processes and the right people in place you will build consensus and support to surge forward when all the pieces are in place. The development process takes time, but when done well, the transition and transformation can be fast. Moving to a new way of doing things is much easier when the picture of the future is clear.

3.) Create Guidelines and Processes for Decision Making:

W.L. Gore is cited as a Participation Age company in “Why Employees are Always a Bad Idea,” and at Gore, they embrace the “above-the-waterline” and

“below-the-waterline” method of decision making which says that any decision that won't sink the business should be made at the level at which it needs to be carried out. If the decision will affect the future of the company or could create long-term potential harm, enough people should get involved to ensure it won't. So, a Participation Age company doesn't throw caution to the winds and allow the “inmates to run the prison,” but it puts processes and people in place that make smart decisions and create profitable outcomes. They make decisions and move forward.

The business world is moving toward the Participation Age. It's evident in our young technology super-stars who look at work as “what you do, not a place where you go.” To be fully engaged in meaningful work is the most rewarding outcome of the work day. To participate, to engage, to create significance: that's what we all hope to do.

