

Business Coaches Discuss Magnet Companies, Lead Dogs, Hammers and Doing What You Say

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL GNADE

Business Monadnock sat down with three local business coaches to discuss what they see as components of great company cultures. President of the Keene Sentinel Terrence Williams interviewed Jeff Saari, of Jeff Saari Coaching in Keene; Ann Connor of AdviCoach in Keene; and Paula Mathews of HR Compliance 101 of Fitzwilliam. The following is an edited transcript of that conversation.

Williams: I'll start with you Ann. One of the things I think would be interesting, from my view point, is to understand when you consult with people, when you coach people, what are you looking to do with these folks in order that they might create a culture in their company or in their business that is productive, that is helpful, that assists the company in growing? What do you think are some of the attributes that make a good business culture?

Connor: When I first go into a company, a lot of times the business owners really don't know what it is they need. They just know it's not working, what they're doing today. As we're doing that, and I get into the financials, I get into the marketing, I get into all that kind of stuff, but as we're doing that I find out a lot deeper of what's going on.

What you first hear is all superficial. "My team just won't work together. They just aren't paying attention. They're not following directions." It's totally deeper than that. Usually, it's communication skills or people don't really have job descriptions. They don't really know what they're supposed to be doing. They don't understand the expectations.

So when you really dig down deep, and really find that stuff out, you build the model. You build, it may be, a job description or having meetings about what is it you really expect from people. Have you ever had that conversation with them? Are you compensating them correctly? Do they feel valued? Those kind of things, and it's not just one conversation. It's multiple conversations.

(For) A lot of business owners it's me-or-the-highway mentality sometimes. You've got to understand that without your people you have nothing. Your people are the most important asset that you have.

So it's a lot of education, a lot



of training, a lot of having you admit that, "Yeah, I have a problem with doing this, and I'm not handling (it) as well as I should." So it's really almost a therapy session, honestly, a counseling therapy session because they have to admit there's a problem before you can have change.

Williams: Paula, what about you?

Mathews: I go into a business in various ways, but for the most part, when clients find out about me, I go in and I do a compliance assessment. My assessment covers over 130 topics in the human resource and the safety realm. So it's a three-hour process, and during that process you'll learn a lot about the business, how long they've been (around), what their turnover is. You don't always get all of that information in the first

meeting, but the compliance assessment tells me where they are in terms of what they're supposed to be doing with regards to state, federal and OSHA regulations. What are they missing? Then they know what it's going to cost to fill those holes. I consider that my

loss leader. It gets me in the door.

You've got to gain their trust because when they share their financial information, they're really opening their hearts and souls to you. So, when they share with me what their turnover rate is and that type of thing and all of the issues involved with running their business, they're opening that door. So once they get to know me and really trust me, then I can say, "Who are your bad kids? Who are the employees nobody else wants to work with?"

A lot of businesses don't understand that their culture is the people that they hire. So if they hire people that come to work and want to do a great job every day and work with others and do the best they can, those are the kind of people they're going to attract.

If the culture is such where

it doesn't matter if you come to work on time, doesn't matter if you work on Mondays and Fridays, doesn't matter if you make mistakes, there's no consequence for poor behavior or not meeting the expectations, then those are the kind of people you attract and those companies have very high turnover, very low morale and poor culture.

Williams: Jeff, are there business cultures you see that you immediately recognize as productive? If so, what are the clues that make you think, "Here's a company that understands what it means to have a good culture?"

Saari: It's funny because businesses can be profitable and yet very dysfunctional. They can produce a lot and not have a good culture. So there's that discrepancy.

The leaders that come to me, usually by a referral, (think they are) very open to looking at this world culture. To Ann's point, they may not know that they're enabling some of these things, but as they start to trust the safety of my space, I always try to turn the eyes backwards so they can self-reflect on how they're enabling some of these things. It's always enlightening.

So, openness to wanting this thing is the first prerequisite. It's not just, "I want to have Jeff come in just to fix a problem relationship."

All of my clients have very productive environments. Some just need tweaking. They have a good foundation, a good base. They have a pretty conscious leader, but there are some challenges in communication or whatever. I have also had companies who struggle with

hindered productivity because of negativity and dysfunction.

Williams: I'd be curious, Ann, from your viewpoint, when a culture's working right, what do you see?

Connor: I see innovation. I see excellent production. Not necessarily (do I) see great financials, because sometimes financials are what they are, but what I see is a positive, energetic environment. I don't see my business owners as stressed because they feel good. They can rely on their team, and they feel good about who's behind them.

So they're more open to different ideas, innovative thinking, trying some things that they could be uncomfortable with. They also know they're not the only decision-maker. They've got a team to support them... Some of my business owners who feel like they don't have a team, they just are way down because they feel it's on their shoulders, and

they don't take advantage of the talent they have around them.

I also find that the way they hire, the way they review, the way they do all that kind of stuff, can create a much better environment.

The reviewing process, I think, is really critical to any company and it's not one of those reviews of satisfactory, I think you did this wrong. It's a conversation of where we are today and where do we need to go. They've got great core values and beliefs that they hire against. So they're hiring for their culture.

You can have a great candidate that has all the skills, has the experience, but if they don't share your core values and beliefs, you will have a problem with them in terms of your culture - and culture is key.

So I just find that those are the (companies) that their turnover is low, their production is high, and their stress is manageable.

Williams: So Paula, Jeff mentioned it's nice, it's important,

maybe it's unusual, but a leader of a company invites you in and he's open enough to be mindful that changes may need to be made. How do you deal with that person if it's them that needs to make the change?

Mathews: Well, that's always a tough one. So then you can have those conversations and sometimes it's a year, it's two years. It's awhile before you can say, "Hey look Ivan, I think you'd do much better if we have somebody that was right below you that could direct your people because, gee, you know, this person left because they didn't feel you were dealing with them in an appropriate manner, or your scheduling was poor or whatever. This person left and this person, and they were all good people, and I don't want to say you chased them away, but you chased them away.

How do we keep those people here?

Maybe we find someone who

can be your working lead person to take care of the people issues, and then you can become the teacher, the coach and train these people and teach them all your brilliance. Share that brilliance with them.

They're not easy conversations to have, and sometimes I'll get the call at 6 o'clock at night or 7 o'clock at night because they just had a guy quit on them. "I did everything I could." Well, no you didn't. This is why I think this particular individual is no longer with us.

We can't do anything about the "woulda shoulda coulda." We can't do anything about him. He's gone. What do we do so that when we hire his replacement that person doesn't leave you in the lurch again?

You also have to create ladders for people to climb within the organizations. As any business person or HR person, you've got to be able to look applicants in the eye and say, "This is a good company to work for. They'll treat

DOING WHAT YOU SAY CONTINUED ON PAGE 28



CHARTER OAK CONSULTING, LLC

A CATALYST FOR PROGRESS

Managing a business has never been more challenging, and the right resources can help your business reach its potential.

We can provide focused, short term assistance and custom solutions to help you reach your goals.

We have expertise in:

- ◆ Business Management
- ◆ New Business Development
- ◆ Finance
- ◆ Banking & Bonding Relationships
- ◆ Risk Management
- ◆ Strategic Planning

Our initial consultation is provided at no charge, so call us today!

PHONE 603.392.0281 • CHARTEROAKCONSULTING.COM

Keene's Oldest Family Owned Restaurant Since 1969

The Pub

Restaurant and Caterers

Keene's Premier Caterers

Call Kim to plan your next

• Company Outing •

• On or Off Site Business Luncheon •

• Take Out Always Available •

131 Winchester Street, Keene, NH
603-352-3135

www.ThePubRestaurant.com



Full Liquor License ~ On and Off Site Catering ~ Fully Licensed and Insured
Private Function Room Available at No Charge With Catering

K&J DEAN

BUILDERS, INC.

ESTABLISHED 1985

KANDJBUILDERS.COM

WE'RE #1 IN CUSTOM BUILT HOMES

603-499-3561

603-252-9530

you honestly and fairly and you'll have opportunities for growth."

As an HR person, when you can't say that anymore, it's time to go. That's why I left both corporate jobs. So owners have to understand that, too. They need to do what they say, say what they do. It needs to be in writing. People will lose faith with management if they can't trust them then they won't stay.

Saari: Can I say one thing? Awesome. I love that question of what it takes to help a leader change. You guys have said it. It's hard to give the boss feedback, to put it out there. So we're in this auspicious position (as coaches) to push back on the leader and say, "You know, I've just noticed something. From what you're telling me you got triggered and then you were sarcastic at someone. So you know, no wonder you got this result. Now, you've got someone that's teed off and gossiping about this."

I had one leader say, "Well I'm doing my best." I looked him point blank and said, "Are you?" Well, let's talk through it. What have you done?"

So he cataloged some things. I said, "Okay, so that's what you've done. Do you think there's one other thing that you could do?" That led into a conversation of about 20 different things we could do, and it just opened up this collaborative, open spirit of going past this block, of this assumption that he's done everything he could do.

Now, if you've done everything you could do and it doesn't work, okay that's fine.

Mathews: Also, when a person starts doing his business, he knows how to make his widget. He makes a better widget than anybody else, but that's what he knows how to do. So he starts doing it part-time, at night, on weekends, in the garage, in the cellar, and the wife takes care of the books when she's not doing her job or taking care of the kids.

He's right, he does make a better widget than somebody else

does. Then he brings in somebody to help him make that widget. It's somebody he knows, somebody he used to work with. Then, it's 17 years later, and he's got a dozen people working for him. He's still flying by the seat of his pants, and he doesn't know what he doesn't know. He never started out with a real plan of action. He was just hiring anybody that looked good, smelled good, felt good. It's hard to teach them then that the people they hired are the ones that created the culture of the business unless they've got a real vision...

Williams: Before we all got together, you were talking about your experience at Sam's Club, Ann, which I thought was really interesting because you said, "You never worked harder, but you never enjoyed yourself more." Maybe you could talk a little bit about why that was the case.

Connor: To know and to understand Walmart or Sam's Club, you have to work there. I worked corporate. Now, if you go out to the stores and clubs; totally different culture out there, totally different. If Sam's Club opened a corporate office here I would be very happy. I miss the team, the team environment. We spent so much time together we thought we were related. That's how much time you spend with these people. It's like, "Do I know you from a distant life or something?" That's how together you are... They knew me as a person and they knew although our work-life balance was totally off, because you had no life at all. It was work. They made you feel that you were part of something bigger. That you were part of a family. It wasn't sterile. It was comfortable. It was friendly.

We had a 10-foot rule. We had to say hello to someone that you were within 10 feet of at all times, even if you saw the person 3,000 times a day.

We had coaching while walking around, meaning that my boss would come every day. He was forced in a sense to talk to

you, but Brad wasn't like that. Brad spoke to you because Brad wanted to speak to you, but it wasn't about work. It was, "How ya doing? How you feel? What's going on? What'd you do this weekend? How are the kids?"

It was just an overall conversation. Of course there were those days, but for the most part you never really felt boss-employee, or "I've got to keep my head down and not get in trouble." You're allowed to make mistakes. Very few people got fired because they made a mistake. Usually it was a culture issue, but for the most part, you came to work every day, and you knew that you had to make your numbers, but if you didn't, as long as you had a plan, as long as you were always going forward, always looking, life was going to be okay. As opposed to that pressure of, "Oh my God I've got to produce, got to produce or I'm in trouble."

Williams: That's really interesting. So Jeff, (hypothetically), I've got this company that's got 50 employees and we're manufacturers of some high technology thing, and I've decided that I want to make a change, and I want you to come run the company. Tell me quickly, shortly, how you are going to build a productive culture in which you're being thrust into. You want something creative, you want something innovative, you want something productive. You want to meet your numbers, you want that harmonious family-type environment that Ann just described. So what are you going to do?

Saari: It's awesome. I love that challenge. It's sometimes hard to get 50 people together. So I want to break it down, might be through an organizational chart: this team does sales, this team does manufacturing or whatever. I want to parse out who I can meet with and make a logistical puzzle.

Once we have that established, what I do is go in and first order of business is I start to unleash appreciation. I give people permission (to be appreciative and to appreciate). One of the biggest

problems, besides money, I hear in an organization, is, "I don't feel valued. I don't feel appreciated." I hear it over and over again, even from the top.

So I would come and I would start building a relationship with people, get to know them. Some people aren't as touchy-feely, so I make concessions for that. I try to feel it out the best I can, and I bring appreciation. We start building that way. Then I bring a specific tool box with three things ...to always have on their side that they can open up at any given situation.

Those three things basically are trigger management. They have to know the triggers and know how they react to stop the knee-jerk reactions.

Second, they need to take positive action, giving and receiving feedback. They need to be able to do that at will. Third is they need to listen to each other very well. They need to learn listening skills so they can coach their fellow employees through a challenging trigger, through a feedback session, and by doing that, over time, you increase the morale. You increase the communication... You decrease the stress. You increase the productivity, which is amazing. When people can actually start talking to each other, and have these tools and appreciate each other and know each other, they start to innovate. They start to really bring ideas up.

Mathews: One of the things I do when I go in, if I'm going to do a recruitment, I do a cultural assessment, and I ask them, "Okay, what's your turnover rate? When's the last time you advertised? What percentage of your people are optimists versus pessimists?"

Williams: How do you get at that? How do you find out if somebody's an optimist?

Mathews: You ask. The employer of 20 people knows who his optimists and pessimists are. Then he'll tell you the seniority of his people. Ask: Do you have a mission? Do you have an objective? Do you have core objectives? Do you have core values?

Do you have a handbook? What are your benefits like?

I get as much information from them, about the facts and figures, the optimists/pessimists, some of the touchy-feely stuff, and then, if I haven't worked for that company, that information tells me a lot about their culture.

I say, "Okay, so what kind of people do we need here?" It depends on the industry. The one I'm thinking about right now is related to the trades. You know, trades people have a particular challenge because from April to the end of November they are scrambling to make their money. A lot of these companies layoff in the winter and therefore they're starting with a brand new crew the next season. So how can you keep these guys busy all season long so we can actually create a culture of sustainability?

I go in. I say, "Okay, you want honest people. You want people that are going to try to do a good job." Then you screen for those type of people. I tell my clients, "If you don't know the person you're hiring personally or you haven't thoroughly checked them out, vetted them, you're putting your company at risk." There's too many game players out there, and those people are practiced. They fool me, too. So if you don't want somebody that's going to come in and a month later be claiming worker's comp or harassment or discrimination, you want to have a very robust pre-employment process.

What we do is, I do phone interviews and the phone interview is basically, "What's your work history? How did you leave? When did you leave? How did you leave? What's your motivation? Why do you want to work for my company?" Depending on the answers I get, then I'll say, "Okay, let's set them up for a one-day trial." Then we also check the references very, very thoroughly, so that we don't get the game players in.

Then, if they pass the one-day trial, it's on to, "Okay, we'll try you out for 90 days and see if

we've got a good fit," because it's not the technical aspects you're looking for. It's "Can they play well with the rest of the people you've got working for you?"

I tell my clients, "You have an obligation to the other people you've employed, to hire people that are going to play well with them."

Hiring is a real challenge, especially if they've been hiring warm bodies and they don't understand the difference between hiring the warm body and hiring somebody that you thoroughly vetted.

Williams: Let's talk about management for a minute. What are the qualities that you think are must-haves for a good manager?

Mathews: Honesty.

Connor: Yeah, honesty is huge. The ability to look past their own pain in terms of if they're having a bad day; the ability to look past that and always be there for their people. Communication and just knowing how to communicate. Communication is not easy. I'm not talking about sharing a message. I'm talking about sharing a message in the right way to the people.

We all hear things differently. You may say something to Jeff, and I'll be sitting there going, "I have no idea what that just meant," because you're not bullet-pointing. I want bullet points; just get to the message because if it's long and drawn out, I'm sleeping. I've lost my attention span. So you really have to understand how to communicate to your people.

I think the best managers are the ones that listen with an open mind. They can have those honest conversations without their staff feeling, "I can't say it because it's the boss." Or, "I'm going to get fired if I give my opinion." It has to be that culture of openness of safety.

All of our clients we work with own their own business. The worst managers I've ever worked with are the ones who tell people they own their own business as



opposed to this is our business. Including their staff in the fact that "we all have ownership." I like to teach my clients ownership. I'll work a lot better if I feel like I have ownership, but if I feel like I'm just doing a task to do a task, then my production may be different. My attitude may be different. I find that the business owners who are inclusive do a lot better with their team than the ones who say, "Hey this is my company. You're spending my money. I'm not going to listen to your ideas because this is all about me," kind of thing.

Mathews: What they do for one, they do for all. Some of my challenges are family businesses. I'll say to them, "Oh, you don't have an employee handbook, okay. Let me ask you, family members, do you go by one set of rules? Do non-family members go by another set of rules?" If that's true, you don't want a handbook and you probably don't want to work with me either, but you don't want a handbook because your other people are going to call you on it. So one of the things for managers is they've got to be as consistent and equitable in their praise, in their feedback, in how they treat people. What you do for one, you do for all. So everybody knows, even if they don't like the rules. If the rules are applied equally to everybody, okay, they're not being unfair to me. Managers that are inconsistent with their treatment of people are poor and they don't last long.

Williams: Those are really

good points. I'm going to flip it around a little bit here. I think we've all probably worked in environments in which we did not see what you just described. So I'd be interested in the train wrecks. What didn't work? These are the lessons that you tuck away and you say, "I am never going to be like that." So I'd be curious Jeff.

Saari: Sure. One came to mind when you guys were talking about strengths. I love when leaders can own their mistakes when they fall off the rails. We're all human. We're going to get a bee in our bonnet and we're probably going to act accordingly from that bee, to let the steam off.

On the flip-side of that is when someone just has the hammer, thinking of the toolbox analogy again. If you only have a hammer and you're beating people up with it all the time, and you're triggered, and you're yelling or you're using sarcasm, or you're belittling somebody or being intimidating or condescending, that doesn't work. I've never seen that work.

You may change people's behavior, but it's done out of a different motivation. People are afraid. They'll just do it to please you, and then when you turn your back, they're telling everyone what an SOB you are. That's a train wreck. That's huge...it's hard to pump the brakes on that train when you feel it leaving the station. I would say that's one attribute of a train wreck culture that I've seen.

Connor: I totally agree with that. I would also say a train wreck

DOING WHAT YOU SAY CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



is where there's no open communication, lots of secrecy, lots of closed-door-kind of things. So you never know what's going on. So, people are uncomfortable because they don't know what's going on, but they spend more time at the water cooler talking about what's going on than actually doing their job. I think that's a huge train wreck.

From my clients, I think one of my biggest train wrecks is the owner that keeps saying, "This is my company, this is my money, this is mine, mine, mine, mine, mine, mine." I just watch the staff and I hear rumors... I'm surprised they're not doing a mutiny. You're afraid to ask for anything because you think you're dipping your hand in the (company) pocket... So it takes away the "How can we grow the business. How can we have those open conversations, regardless of the fact that you might not agree, regardless of the fact that it may take some of the profitability away from the company? How do we grow?" I think for any company to grow, you need open communication and open creativity from all ends. It doesn't really matter that it didn't come from the CEO. It could come from your two-week employee, which is fantastic.

Saari: Can I give you a real quick specific, then you probably have a thought, but a friend of mine worked at a company. I won't say the name. He approached his boss saying, "Hey I have an idea how to make the line better." His manager literally said this, "You're

not paid to think. You're paid to produce. Go back to work."

Williams: Hard to believe.

Saari: Hard to believe that's alive in company culture.

Connor: It's alive and healthy.

Mathews: It is, unfortunately.

Williams: Paula, I'm curious about what a good company culture looks like in an environment in which your hair's on fire. So you're in an industry that is being disrupted. You don't have, necessarily, the luxury of time to solve all these problems. You're in crisis, maybe not by what you're doing, but maybe by the circumstances that you find yourself in. You need to try to maintain a good company culture and incent creativity and all that stuff, while you're just sitting there wondering whether or not you're going to be able to meet payroll. What do you recommend?

Mathews: Just went through this with one of my clients. They're a design engineering firm and they work on pieces of equipment that take two years to build. They had a client who said, "I know the project isn't due until this date. We need you to pull that project in by sixty days." For them that was huge.

What those people did was they brought the team together every single morning and said, "Okay what do we need to get done today to get to this next level? What can we put aside so that we can make this happen?" Then, every night, before they shut the doors, "How'd it go today? What were your problems today? What are we facing tomorrow?"

So it's that open communication, and it's working with them saying, "I need everybody on the team to really step up to the plate. We've got to put in that extra time. We've got to get this done." It was that, get that team together, "What are your problems... Okay, now let's go. Let's get it done."

Williams: So these things are all commonsensical, I think, what you've described. Why is it so hard?

Mathews: Because common sense isn't as common as it used to be.

Williams: Why is it so hard, Ann?

Connor: I think most of our clients are in the weeds, right? On the daily operations they don't look above the grass-line. So they don't see things coming until they've smacked them in the face. They're not being strategic. Business owners should not be on the line, doing their thing, making their widgets. They should be above that, being strategic, having a team behind them. But some of them think that they are the only one that can make that widget just the right way.

So it's really the approach. What kind of business do they want to have? Do they want to be the technical guy that's just (doing the) plumbing and going on the calls, or do they want to be the manager or entrepreneur that's managing the team and thinking strategically?

I think it's hard because they're working by the seat of their pants. They're working in the moment, and in that particular moment, they're only thinking an hour away or two hours away. I think to be able to do all this stuff, you have to put some strategic thought into it, whether it's the planning process, whether it's creating a different organizational structure, whatever it is. We have to be strategic, and that takes time and thought away from that day to day operations.

Williams: I was at a conference. We were talking about problem employees. How do you

deal with them? (The speaker) had a very simple philosophy, and it probably sounds pretty harsh. I'll relate it to you. It's not mine, but it's one I'd be interested to hear your comments on. He said that he identified the lead dogs in his operation and he said, "I work with the lead dogs. The dead dogs, I shoot." I thought, "Wow, that's a really drastic approach to things." I'm curious about how you react to that. I understood what he was saying, and I've certainly worked with lead dogs and it's a pretty energizing, fun thing to do. I'm curious what you think of that Jeff.

Saari: It's awesome. I love that because if you've ever read "Workforce Scorecard," they really tell you to develop your "A" players and have that kind of structure. It's a very dense book, so I didn't get through all of it, but the message I took out of it is... I love consistency and fairness with rules and protocols, but to develop people and see their potential and strengths, some people are just more motivated than other people.

On the other side, it reminds me of Pike Place Fish Market (in Seattle). He has a chapter that says, "My stupid brother Dickey." He had an assumption that his brother was so stupid that he could never be the manager of this business. Working through his coach, he challenged that assumption, and his brother Dickey's been there for 25 years, exceeded every milestone every year. A couple dips here and there, but his brother has turned out to be not-stupid-brother Dickey, like the most-amazing-manager-brother Dickey.

So I think if we have an assumption that they're the dead dogs, then maybe what we're doing is we're ostracizing them. We're not giving people their due shake and fairness to empower them, give them feedback, to give them a chance to grow, learn, be challenged.

A lot of companies don't have this. It's just loosey-goosey. Old John, he's just an old codger. He's

a dead dog, but he does okay work. We'll just keep him. It's not conscious. So I totally agree with shooting the dead dog if he's really a dead dog. Until we get to the dead dog, we need to know it's a dead dog.

Mathews: Well there's a story. This man had a very successful business. His people loved him and he was having an after-hours thing for the spouses. A husband goes up to him and says, "Oh my God. My wife loves working for you. She thinks you've got an awesome company, great benefits. What's the secret of your success?"

The guy looks him in the eye and he says, "I fire the unhappy ones."

We laugh about that, but thing is ... if you do everything in your power to make a person happy with their job, with the culture, with their job functions, and nothing makes them happy and they're never going to be part of your culture, then they need to go away and be replaced with somebody that gets your culture and is going to be happy there.

So when he says, "I fire the unhappy ones," they're not dead dogs, but they can be a drag on the culture if they aren't going to play well with everybody else and be part of the team. You either get on the train or get off the tracks.

Connor: Both valid, great points. Culture is so key. You've got the right culture, with the right people, you're going to get production and you're going to be very profitable. I talk to my clients about being a magnet company - the place where people are calling you to say, "You got anything open?"

So my little mantra, as opposed to shooting anybody, is you teach them, train them, or get rid of them, basically. You teach them what you want, your expectations, attitude as well as skill experience and job knowledge and all that kind of stuff. If that doesn't work, then you train them, Dale Carnegie, or some

other kind of thing you can send them to. If that doesn't work, then you've done your due diligence and it's time to part ways.

That's the kind of way I look at it, because you can sometimes resuscitate these people Most times you can't, but there's always those surprises. So as long as you've done your due diligence, you feel good about the conversations and they still don't jump on the bus, then they really should go, because they're really not helping the situation out.

Williams: I've always wondered how you flip that around and spend more time working with those that are going to get you there. I think that remains a challenge for business owners. They tend to let the folks who are really good and are good at doing their jobs, go do their jobs. They spend a lot of time on those who aren't getting you there. What are your suggestions? I'll start with you Ann on harnessing the lead dogs and making sure you're spending more time, perhaps, with them?

Connor: You definitely want to take that "A" team and give them what they need, whether it's compensation, bonus structure, all that kind of stuff, and keep them happy. What you want to do is create a challenge or a competition of getting those people to rise. You're only as good as your worst employee. So you want to get them to rise up...I totally believe in timelines. If by X date you're not where you need to be, then we need to have another conversation. So you need to weed through these people quickly.

Now, if you're that magnet company, you have a whole file full of resumes of people that are dying to work for you. So you can go right to that resume and pick out your next person. If you can't fix them in so many days, then the truth is you're not going to. You have to come to terms with how much time am I going to invest in this person or these people before

I'm starting to lose money now. Your time is worth something.

Williams: Is it okay to be, perhaps, not equal in how you treat your lead folks over everybody else?

Connor: Yes, I believe so, but you have to tie to production or metrics of some kind. Business is really black and white if you look at it because we're all here to make money. We're all here to be in a good environment. We have deadlines and timelines and all those things. So it's very easy to justify why one team may be getting more than the next and because you've tied it to metrics.

Williams: I'm going to close it out with one last question. It's going to take off a comment you, Ann, made about creating a magnet company. It would seem to me that retention and attraction are two pretty important things for businesses here. How am I going to find people? How am I going to hold on to people, and more importantly, how am I going to find and hold on to good people? So I'm going to start with you, Ann. Give me some attributes of a magnet company?

Connor: Good benefits, good employee compensation. There's some companies out in Manchester and some places where their magnet company is you can play pool in the middle of the day. They've got kegs of beer. They've got all this kind of stuff, and they're great magnet companies, I guess for the 20-somethings. I don't really believe in that. I think the magnet company should be something that is stable and all about running a business as opposed to having games in the middle of the day.

I think it's just really having an honest culture, treating people fairly, enjoying coming to work, and it's not one of those, "Oh my God, I've got to get up and go to this place yet again." Being cognizant of your work-life balance, being very flexible with your time, knowing that I'm going to come to work, I'm going to be heard, I'm going to be respected. Respect for the individual is enormous, at all levels.

I can have an honest to honest conversation with the owner or my boss or whatever, and have a great conversation without feeling like it's going to come back to haunt me.

Mathews: That they've got a respectful workplace. I think that's the bottom line. That you're as transparent as you can be. You share as much information with your employees as possible. You create a culture that follows the best practices of respectful workplaces. There's zero tolerance for stealing, for bullying, for cursing, for harassment, and you post all the open jobs to let people have the opportunity for growth.

People come to work. They know that you care about them. That the management cares about them. They want to keep them safe and that they will be treated with respect by all and they'll be treated honestly and fairly.

I think if people have faith that management will do what they say, say what they do and that they can trust management on that level, they'll stay and that company will become a magnet company.

If it's a respectful workplace, in every sense of the word, then it's going to have a good culture.

Saari: I agree with everything. I would add that people's voices matter. So I can speak up and I'm going to be heard, whether or not they're going to agree with me or not. You felt heard at Sam's Club, even if they said, "No, we can't do that right now Ann." Collaboration and innovation are cherished.

One of my companies that I work with said, "The true test of whether it's a magnet company ... is what the employees say when they go home and tell their friends and family and their other people in their lives. What are they saying about that company? That's the true test, and I worked with a couple of companies that they've got that down solid. A really solid place to work, and they feel valued and they love it, and they tell everyone about it. ■