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Reviving Work Ethic

A Leader's Guide to Ending Entitlement and Restoring Pride in the Emerging Workforce

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Reviving Work Ethic is a guide for frustrated managers and leaders on how to instill a strong work ethic in the modern workforce.
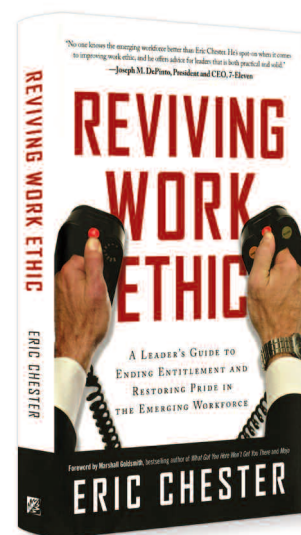
Work ethic in America is fast declining, plaguing young and old alike. But in *Reviving Work Ethic*, renowned consultant, speaker and author Eric Chester shows that you do best to focus on your young employees — those whose habits and ideals can still be influenced. He presents an incisive look at the root of the entitlement mentality that afflicts many in the emerging workforce and shows you the specific actions you can take to give your employees a deep commitment to performing excellent work.

Chester's advice is crucial to a healthy bottom line: Too often, talented–but–difficult–to–understand younger workers stand between your company and profits. If business owners, managers and executives are not connecting with employees and modeling the key components of work ethic, employees are likely not connecting effectively with customers — leaving all kinds of money on the table.

Reviving Work Ethic is the culmination of years of research as well as presentations to more than 2 million youth. Chester's experience shows in his confident analysis of the seven components of work ethic and in his proven strategies for handing them down to young employees.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Advice for leaders that is both practical and solid.
- How to get inside the heads — and hearts — of young people.
- How to get young people to take pride in their work.
- How to improve the performance of young people in today's workforce.
- Seven components of work ethic and proven strategies for handing them down to the emerging workforce.

by Eric Chester

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: REVIVING WORK ETHIC
by Eric Chester

Introduction

A person's *qualities* lay the foundation for his or her *achievements*. It's hard to achieve anything worthy of merit without demonstrating qualities like reliability, determination, perseverance and integrity. And while *possessions* can make you happy, they won't fill you with pride if they've blown into your life without achievement.

There was a time when achievement meant more than possessions, and when character (a person's qualities) was valued more than achievement. Americans felt good about putting in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. This was the time when "Made in America" was the best label any product could bear, quality was everyone's priority and companies made decisions to ensure long-term stability — not short-term gains for stockholders.

But young adults today have grown up in a world where most people work hard to find ways of avoiding hard work. They've heard stories telling how lottery winners, day traders, bloggers, dot-commers and Internet marketers have managed to beat the system and derive a huge bounty with little or no effort. They've been inundated with reality television that turns talentless fools into millionaires in the blink of an eye and with the greatest of ease.

Is it any wonder there is a burgeoning entitlement mentality among the new workforce?

Work has degenerated to little more than a four letter word; a necessary evil. It's no longer viewed as something to be proud of, but rather something to disdain, to shortcut or to elude all together.

If we do nothing to reverse this gross misconception, we will not only be doing our kids a great disservice; we will be allowing the further contamination of our labor pool.

Leaders can no longer stand idly by in hopes that parents and teachers will resume the responsibility for instilling work ethic. Parents now focus most of their attention on ensuring that their kids are healthy, happy and have a high self-esteem. Meanwhile, schools are facing widespread criticism and massive cutbacks, and are concentrating every available resource on increasing test scores and keeping students safe.

Therefore, the burden of developing work ethic within the emerging workforce has shifted to employers. Organizations that neglect this responsibility will continue to point the finger at parents and schools for the unsatisfactory product they are getting. They'll have no choice but to export labor overseas, replace human interaction with touchscreen technologies or churn-and-burn their front-line people, whom they see as an expendable commodity.

Leaders who accept this new reality and rise to the challenge will create cultures that promote the qualities and values needed. In doing so, they will develop talent pools that soon run deep with creative, energetic and dedicated individuals whose efforts boldly exclaim, "I'm proud of my work."

It's time to revive work ethic. ●

Rewinding the Game of Life

The Current State of Work Ethic

Somewhere along the way, Western culture has lost sight of the virtues that comprise work ethic — the very

things that helped build our country. The pursuit of happiness and the American Dream drove progress and innovation, but they came with unintended side effects. In many cases, for instance, healthy ambition has morphed into avarice. Urbanization and an emphasis on large-scale businesses means fewer and fewer kids are learning abut work in the natural course of family life. Technological advances that make life faster, more fun, more entertaining and easier to navigate are also consuming our time and energy while eliminating avenues for learning vital concepts about work. And pop psychologists have pushed parents to focus on building self-esteem in their children, creating at least two generations of me-centric workers.

America's emerging workforce — those in the 16-to-24 age bracket — finds itself uniquely positioned to turn this tide, both because of its size (50 million by some estimations) and because the young are the most moldable. A transformation — or at the very least, an introduction — to traditional work ethic within this age group will last for decades and influence the workforce and communities in positive ways for generations.

In February 2010, the Pew Research Center released an extensive report titled "Millennials: A portrait of Generation Next" that describes this generation (ages 18 to 29) as "confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat, and open to change." It is history's first "always connected generation," the report says, and it's on track to become the "most educated generation in American history." But this generation doesn't identify with work ethic.

Many of the negative habits, mindsets and attitudes embedded in the emerging workforce result from messages that have focused on how great young people are and how they are special enough to warrant success.

Fostering positive self-esteem seems pretty good on the surface; it's much better than promoting self-loathing, but the heart of the self-esteem message is to esteem the self, and eventually that creates a self-focused, entitled mentality. So while the emerging workforce has been taught the importance of saving the world, these individuals also feel empowered to do so strictly on their own terms. They can quickly change course and move away from the most high-minded agenda if it isn't meeting their personal, self-established needs.

Naturally, this mentality — esteem for self over others — finds its way into the workforce as a lack of respect for anything that doesn't please and satisfy the young employee's selfish desires.

Instilling a traditional work ethic into the emerging workforce can produce a seismic economic and cultural shift in America. We have an emerging workforce that embraces change, is better educated and more innovation-focused than any previous generation, and wants to change the world for the better.

All of the advantages, however, can become seeds lost among the weeds. To make sure they find fertile soil, take root, grow and bear fruit, members of the emerging workforce must shed their notions about being entitled to a job, and about reward coming before effort. ●

Coming to Terms with This Thing Called Work Ethic

When children are old enough to understand and comprehend basic commands, parents and teachers begin subtly and overtly programming their value systems. This begins shortly after birth and increases daily, all in an attempt to help the little tykes make good choices; their parents and teachers hope these good choices will help them live a happier and more successful life.

Sandbox Values

The common messages behind the values taught to children transcend cultural, ethnic, gender, religious and economic differences. Children all around the world are taught to:

- Smile and play nice.
- Be prompt.
- Look their best.
- Do their best.
- Obey the rules.
- Tell the truth.
- Say *please* and *thank you*.

Now compare those Sandbox Values to a sentence which summarizes hundreds of responses from business leaders who were asked what they are looking for in their employees:

Employers are searching for positive, enthusiastic people who show up for work on time, who are dressed and prepared properly, who go out of their way to add value and do more than what's required of them, who are honest, who will play by the rules and who will give cheerful, friendly service regardless of the situation.

As you can see, the work ethic that employers desire is rooted in the exact same lessons we learned as toddlers.

To bridge the Sandbox Values and the values that make up work ethic, here are seven terms — markers, if you will — that summarize the values that are common to both: positive attitude, reliability, professionalism, initiative, respect, integrity and gratitude.

There are no negotiables in this list. By that I mean that there isn't any one of the work ethic markers to which you, as a leader, don't personally aspire and hold yourself accountable. Likewise, you expect these same core values to be evident in everyone you work for, work with and oversee.

But before we launch into a strategic discussion of how we can develop each of these markers — and perhaps even more elementary than that, why the challenge of developing these core values in the emerging workforce now rests with employers — let's take a look at our new definition of work ethic:

Work ethic is knowing what to do and doing it. It is marked by an individual's positive attitude, reliability, professionalism, initiative, respect, integrity and gratitude.

Instilling those seven attributes into the hearts and minds of the emerging workforce is the key to keeping our companies — and our country — stable and prosperous. For America's young employees, work ethic is the key to success, whether they are flipping burgers, roofing houses, checking a patient's blood pressure or piloting spacecraft for NASA. ●

Up and Over — The Leader's Challenge

Let's use a horizontal axis to represent a worker's knowledge or "cognizance," of how those seven work ethic markers affect his or her value to an employer. This is the "knowing what to do" part of the definition. So ignorance — not knowing what to do — resides on the left side of the axis. The more a worker learns about what he or she should do, the more he or she moves to the right, toward the "know" side.

We'll then overlay a vertical axis to represent an individual's choices, actions and behaviors as they relate to the seven work ethic markers. This is his or her "compliance" — the "doing it" part of the definition. Inactivity — not doing what he or she should be doing — resides at the bottom. The more the individual "does" — in other words, the more he or she demonstrates behavior proving knowledge of the core values of work ethic — the more he or she moves upward.

By dissecting the cognitive axis (*don't know* and *know*) with the compliance axis (*don't do* and *do*), we can begin to see four distinct quadrants and behavior:

• **The Idle Quadrant.** In the bottom-left quadrant are employees who don't understand work ethic (or any specific marker of it) and don't live it out. Quite simply,

The Work Ethic Matrix
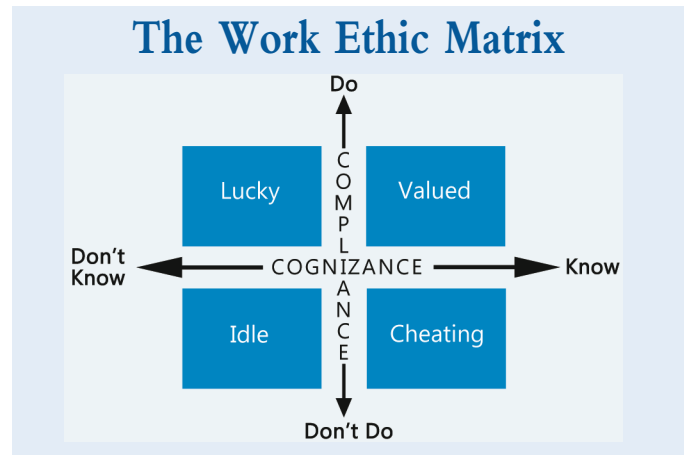
they don't know what any of these seven core values really mean or how they play out in the workplace. If they heard these values expressed when they were children, they left them behind in the sandbox or they were stripped of them in their adolescence. As a result, they don't demonstrate the behavior that is expected of them by their employers.

• **The Lucky Quadrant.** If you've ever played a game without understanding all the rules and won anyway, you've experienced blind luck. This is similar to a worker who has no real comprehension of the markers of work ethic, but takes action that coincidentally demonstrates a core work ethic value. Although the outcome is positive, the behavior is not fueled by commitment, so it's unsustainable.

• **The Cheating Quadrant.** The quadrant in the lower right is where we lose people who understand what they should do but choose not to live it out. This cheating behavior is the most dangerous to leaders, because it pits them squarely at odds with their people.

• **The Valued Quadrant.** Workers who possess a clear knowledge of the seven individual markers of core work ethic, and, as a result, make decisions and choices that demonstrate those markers are operating in an optimal state. These are the workers that make up the Valued Quadrant.

Workers, and not just those in the emerging workforce, move in and out of the four quadrants of work ethic all the time. We all move up and down and from side to side. If we aren't intentionally trying to stay in the Valued Quadrant, we inevitably move out of it.

Great leaders find ways to move people to the right and up on the Work Ethic Matrix and inspire them to operate in a valued state.

How do you move others (and yourself) into the Valued Quadrant? You do that by reaching into those other quadrants and pulling whoever is there up and to

the right. You teach them what they need to know, and you motivate and inspire them to do it. It's a role best defined as part teacher, part motivator. It's in this role that a leader distances him- or herself from being a mere manager by adding real value to his or her people and organization. ●

What Happens When You're Not Watching

Developing cognizance without working hard to gain compliance is akin to entering vast amounts of data into a computer and then unplugging it; it is a waste of time and resources. The computer has to operate to create any value from the data. So let's look at three key elements for generating buy-in for work ethic values.

• **Relevance.** Members of the emerging workforce need to know the why before they will take action on the what. "Don't just tell me what to do," they say (or think). "Tell me why I'm doing it." Explaining the relevance of the desired action is a way of connecting the dots between *what* and *why*.

• **Reward.** There are ways to build in incentives and rewards that encourage and reinforce positive behaviors and create habits that become the building blocks for excellence. Business leaders can create a reward structure that promotes a positive work ethic, not just incentives for those who achieve above-and-beyond excellence.

• **Radiate.** The most powerful values of an organization are radiated throughout the culture. *Radiate*, a transitive verb, means to spread something around as it emanates from a center. The key to radiating values is to spread them throughout teams and organizations. ●

Positive Attitude

Maintaining a positive, optimistic, enthusiastic attitude — regardless of the situation — is an essential component of every job description. That's why it's always the first thing mentioned when employers are asked what they are looking for in new hires. Without question, moving the emerging workforce up, over and into the Valued Quadrant begins with this foundational value.

If you want someone to display a positive attitude at work, you first need to make sure they know what you mean by a positive attitude and what it looks like in your organization. They need to see living examples of positive attitude in action when working for you, and they should be put into situations that allow them to shadow people who model the attitude you are trying to

replicate in them. Attitude is contagious, so let them catch the right virus and go out of your way to make certain they aren't infected with the wrong ones.

Clarifying what a good attitude is begins with the hiring process. You need to be very direct about the duties involved in the job — the good, the bad and the ugly — so you can get the properly shaped pegs in the properly shaped holes.

An Infectious Culture

A positive attitude at work is infectious, so the more you call it out to others and encourage it in key employees, the easier it will be for you to radiate it throughout your culture. This starts with the small things you do, like calling out the guy who works a double shift or the receptionist who comes in when it's snowing, but it continues with how far you radiate those kinds of things each day.

To create a positive culture, talk to your young people about the good things that are happening throughout your business. If you can't share positive news about the company, shine the light on something good that's taking place in your community, the nation or the world. Make it your mission to be a purveyor of good tidings. ●

Reliability

If businesses depend on reliability, and reliability originates with employees, then business leaders need to infuse reliability into their company cultures. The best place to start is by focusing on the significance of being reliable and taking great strides to make certain all of your people understand how important reliability is to you, how it embodies the values of the organization and how it affects their future within the organization.

Reliability begins with showing up — being where you are supposed to be, when you are supposed to be there. That's a foundational expectation that your customers have of you and that you have of your team members.

Developing reliable employees requires helping them see through the myths of popular culture. To borrow the phrasing from the beginning of the old show *ABC's Wide World of Sports*, you need to figure out how to make them experience the thrill of victory (being able to rely on someone to come through) as well as the agony of defeat (when someone they rely on lets them down). Through role-playing, discussion or actual events that they experience while on the job, helping them see how reliability makes or breaks a business — and a career — is absolutely crucial.

Obviously, this starts with setting clear expectations for each worker and then holding tight to those standards. There always come times when good managers make exceptions to the rules, but boundaries are worthless if they aren't consistently enforced. That means you need to think through your expectations for reliability, including the consequences when people are unreliable and the rewards for those who prove their dependability. ●

Professionalism

A professional, quite simply, is someone who understands and represents the organization's best interests, even when that means sacrificing personal preferences. Sometimes preferences line up squarely with the organization's needs, but often, especially for the emerging workforce, they don't. A professional puts the job ahead of personal desires. That means respecting the employer's culture, but it also means acting in the organization's best interests in ways that typically aren't covered by company policy.

Professionalism isn't just what a worker does, but how he or she goes about doing it. How the individual conducts and presents him- or herself — the way he or she dresses, his or her body language, tone of voice, the words chosen, hygiene — all define the worker's persona and become a display of his or her professionalism or lack thereof.

The biggest frustration many leaders experience with the emerging workforce comes from a seeming unwillingness to dress and act like professionals.

With young employees, it's vitally important to clarify your expectations for professionalism even before hiring them. Don't hand them a book of rules; instead, have a conversation that gives you an opportunity to explain what it takes to succeed in your organization, and allows them the freedom to respond to make sure they are on the same page. ●

Initiative

Initiative is relevant to the company because it prepares the worker for additional assignments and makes him or her invaluable to the employer. It's relevant to the employee because it gives life to goals and ambitions, and is the component of work ethic that makes an employee feel the most proud. The employee with initiative can say, "I did that without being told, and I know it made a difference." Initiative will also put him or her in great demand by future employers.

Even though they might not come to you begging for

Leave Nothing to Chance

When addressing something as important — and as controversial — as a dress code, don't simply describe it verbally or expect them to read it in the company handbook. Instead, show photographs of employees wearing both appropriate and inappropriate attire. This is inexpensive and very easy to do. Again, leave nothing to chance and don't surprise them with the specifics of your dress code after they've been hired and are making their way through your orientation.

more work, your employees want to know how they can contribute value to the company. When you let them know that you have a problem you'd like their input on, you'd be amazed at the initiative they'll take in trying to help you solve it. Whether or not they hit on the right solution, getting their minds working toward finding solutions to problems and inviting their contribution takes them out of the automaton state and moves them into an entirely different mindset: "This is my business, too, and when I have an idea for making something better, or if I see a problem that needs fixing, I can add value to the company — and also make myself more valuable in the process." That's right where you want them — fully engaged with head, heart and hands!

Reward Demonstrations of Initiative

When they demonstrate initiative, reward it. You can applaud it on the spot. You can honor it during team meetings. You can acknowledge it in front of employees, clients and customers. You can promote it in the media — both social and traditional. And you can straight-out pay for it by providing a bonus or promotion that says to your entire staff, "We're always on the lookout for people who put their mind — and elbow grease — to work around here." ●

Respect

The emerging workforce wants and needs rules and boundaries, but it doesn't respond well to fear-mongering managers.

Respect blossoms from well-nurtured relationships that are rooted in love, not fear. So the most important thing any leader can do when it comes to cultivating respect is to provide examples of respect. Display a respectful, sacrificial character — be positive, trust others, be polite, listen, be reliable, obey the rules, show mercy. In short, love others and the people around you will respect you for it.

Lead by Example

Fight the urge to demand workers' respect. Unless they're in a life-and-death situation, you're not going to get it. Instead, treat them with the same degree of respect you'd like from them and your actions will be mirrored. At the same time, don't let their definition of respect become yours. You are the boss and are in control. They know that and they'll respect you more for not immediately caving in to their demands. Instead, lead by example. They won't automatically respect you because you are older or because you have an important title attached to your name.

The good news is that your younger workers respect authenticity, accomplishment and competence. If you have a strong personality, let it out. They have strong personalities too, and they are very tolerant of other people's differences. Remember, though, that they can spot a phony in a heartbeat. If you are naturally quiet, then demonstrate to them that you know what you're doing based on experience. When they learn what you did to get where you are — and they see your hard work and character shine through — you will earn their respect. ●

Integrity

Real integrity becomes a part of a person's operating system. Real integrity requires a buy-in and commitment that's from the heart, not just the head.

You can help inspire that with encouraging words and by rewarding and recognizing integrity in the workplace. But to really get buy-in from the emerging workforce, you have to help these individuals value trust and honesty in a world that appears to promote and even celebrate the opposite. How?

First, ditch the punitive. Scare tactics don't work with the emerging workforce. These workers know that the odds of you filing charges against them are slim, because they know how much time and money that will cost you. If you do prosecute them, they know that even if you can prove your case, they'll probably get off with a slap on the wrist. They aren't easily scared by threats and you don't want people who are only honest because they're afraid of getting caught. That doesn't mean you shouldn't clearly communicate consequences. And, by all means, you should enforce those clearly communicated policies. But don't think punishments or the threat of punishment will significantly affect the behaviors of the emerging workforce.

Second, you have to trust them. It's hard, especially when you go back and read the statistics that indicate that this generation of workers, by and large, sees cheating and lying as acceptable. But this generation hates to be micromanaged. If you clearly describe your expectations and set high standards, but then constantly look over workers' shoulders, they will quickly feel like you don't trust them. This will likely make them live down to your expectations. You need checks and balances that protect your business, but give employees a chance to earn your trust. Start with small things and move forward. The greatest way to build trust in a young person is to show that you trust him or her.

Pull Them Out of Their 'Me First' Bubbles

Third, and this is the biggie, you have to pull employees out of their "me first" bubbles and let them see how dishonesty affects both the people around them and their own personal peace. For example, a young employee might think that hooking his buddy up with a free soft drink isn't really an integrity issue. He's been told that fountain drinks are a high-profit item and that it only costs the company a couple of cents for the syrup and the cup. He thinks, "This company makes millions, so it's not going to miss a few pennies here and there." He's thinking of himself, his friends and his reputation, and he doesn't see the connection between his behavior and the real cost to anyone outside his bubble.

This is where a leader can make a tremendous difference. By understanding the mentality, he or she can make certain his or her people know the real cost of the fountain drink — well beyond the cost of the ingredients — and share with them how heavily the company relies on every cent to keep people employed and maintain growth. He or she can also let them know that prices rise when waste of any kind occurs.

Granted, a three-minute lesson like this isn't going to dramatically alter the behavior of anyone and transform a dishonest kid into a boy scout, but it will go a long way toward removing some of the rationalizations the kid might be using to justify his or her actions. From that point forward, he or she will be forced to, at the very least, consider how his or her actions might adversely affect the company, his or her boss and co-workers, and even his or her peace of mind. ●

Gratitude

When the Grinch stole Christmas from all the Whos down in Whoville, he lacked a basic understanding of the spirit behind the holiday. The scrawny-limbed hermit with a nasty attitude and a foul grimace hated the world and everything in it, and he wanted everything and everyone to share in his misery. Of course, it was rumored that his heart was two sizes too small.

So what changed him?

Well, the good Dr. Seuss made the moral quite clear: The Grinch had to see for himself that Christmas wasn't about things, but about giving, loving and caring.

You might have a Grinch or two working for you. They don't solve many problems; in fact, they create them. Why? Because they lack gratitude — for their work, for the company, for their co-workers, for their boss and for their customers.

Unfortunately, you can't teach gratitude. You can define it and tell workers that they need to be grateful. You can tell them to smile, say *thank you,* and be nice to customers and co-workers. But, much like respect, they need to embrace gratitude internally to make it last and to make it truly effective.

Start with Increasing Cognizance

To do this, you still start with increasing cognizance. You can't assume that the emerging workforce arrives with an understanding of what gratitude is or what it looks like — especially in ways that are specific to your team and organization. So you have to assess each employee's understanding of the concept. What were their experiences before joining your team? What do they already know, or not know, about being part of a team? Have they been thankful for previous jobs, or do they take jabs at previous employers? Do they thank you for your time, write a thank-you note for the interview and thank you when they leave? Are they smiling as if all of their material possessions had mysteriously vanished — and then magically returned? Never underestimate the significance of hiring smiling, happy people who exude gratitude.

As a leader, you must make certain your people know what gratitude means to you and your organization. You have to describe the policies and procedures, and teach them the expected corporate culture. The more they understand the scope of your business and their role in bringing customers back, the less likely they'll be to feel lost, insignificant and unimportant. They'll worry less about immediate results and more about the ultimate results — the long-term results that really matter. ●

growing company, but Mayes will readily admit that many don't. As he points out, "Even when we find the people who *can* do the job, we don't know if they *will.*"

So Mayes often meets personally with young hires or connects them to one of the veteran sales reps for some work on the values that are important to their organization. "We coach them and mentor them and give them extra time and attention," Mayes explained.

That time and attention requires focus, however. This is where the business of work ethic gets very personal. It's where you start connecting with the emerging workforce to find ways that help them align their personal needs and expectations with the greater good of the organization. It's where you discover the value propositions that an individual and an organization can share.

There were times when the boss simply laid down the law to the employees, and the employees, usually out of fear of losing their jobs, went along. If they went along for long enough, they learned to appreciate the values. As Mayes and so many other leaders have discovered, that strategy seldom works in today's marketplace.

'You Can't Motivate People by Fear'

"You can't motivate people by fear," Mayes says. "They don't have fear in their hearts. You have to figure out where they are, what they feel, what matters to them and then tie things together. Let's make it happen together — meeting them where they are and giving them a reason to move where they want to go, and where we want to go."

This type of connecting builds the work ethic you need in your employees. And in doing so, it shifts their mindsets away from a utilitarian view of work. When that happens, loyalty increases and turnover decreases. ●

The Valued Proposition

William Mayes, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Senior Home Care, regularly hires from the emerging workforce. His sales team includes around 200 people, and many of the new hires are in their 20s. They have worked part-time jobs, made it through college and had success with one, maybe even two, previous full-time jobs. And they have, or can quickly learn, the skills needed for success as sales reps on Mayes' team. A few have the kind of work ethic required for success with this

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Reviving Work Ethic*, you'll also like:

1. **The Power of Professionalism** by **Bill Wiersma.** Wiersma outlines the seven key mind-sets of trusted professionals, offering a blueprint for both individuals and organizations interested in fostering a culture of professionalism.

2. **Value Shift** by **Lynn Sharp Paine.** Paine's insightful book argues that companies must become moral, as well as financial, members of the community.

3. **In Good Company** by **Laurence Prusak and Don Cohen.** Prusak and Cohen explain how to build up the human connections (based on trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors) that make up your company's social capital.