



Dressed **In** Results

By Todd Nordstrom

An inside look at how your culture is driving your results—through the eyes of renowned culture consultant, Randy Pennington.

You're anxious. You're nervous. Take a deep breath. Crack your knuckles. Check the clock. It's time to make your new people strategy and recruitment presentation to your CEO.

Now, with folder of statistical fodder underarm, make that long walk down the hallway past the sympathetic expressions of your team members. Check your nerves at the door—shoulders back—and get ready to make the first pitch of the rest of your life. Tap politely on the door. Make eye contact. Enter. And, no matter how tempted you are to slouch into those teeny-tiny chairs in front of your bosses desk, remain standing—solid, poised, and confident.

Are you ready for the “opening line” that will change your career forever?

Hold up that folder—unopened—and reach deep down into your gut for vocal command. Just say these words, “Results rule. And, I have results right here.”

Programs, processes, procedures, and new initiatives—we all create them. But, do they generate meaningful results? That's the question your CEO asks every time you enter his or her office with a new plan of attack...to try. “Let's

try this plan,” you might say. And, your boss is calculating the cost and benefit of that “try” while you speak.

What if we could go into that presentation every time with hard facts—results?

“There's really only one way to foster success—for your company, your career, and for your life,” says Randy Pennington, nationally recognized culture consultant, speaker, and author of the book *Results Rule*. “Get results. That's it.”

Go Jobing sat down with Pennington recently. And, although we could have asked this guru of culture a billion questions, we really just wanted to focus on one—how do we get results?

“There are companies out there that run from one new idea to the next—for recruitment, for engagement, and for retention,” says Pennington. “But, the great companies research what works and institutionalize those things into the fiber of their culture. I spoke with Ross Perot about the early days of EDS. What impressed me was that whenever the team discovered an attitude, a procedure, or a methodology of work that worked, Perot immediately anchored that success into the culture. It became

a way of business.”

Pennington is an expert on developing cultures that deliver results. He has a seemingly unrestrained passion for the topic and a freakishly unnatural ability to database and categorize case studies of companies who discovered what works, and implemented successful, results-oriented strategies. He says his passion resulted from a “minor state of confusion” he suffered a long time ago when he was promoted to a Human Resources position at a psychiatric hospital.

“I've always been curious about psychology and sociology,” says Pennington. “When I was promoted to an HR function, I was completely fascinated by why people hated their jobs so much. My first instinct was to look for reasons within the people. But, then I realized that the situation was bigger than just employee frustration—these people weren't being offered any real reason to engage in their work even though they were working in their chosen professions.”

Pennington began researching organizations that had built results-focused cultures. He transitioned his passion and curiosity into a career with a consulting firm, but still wasn't satisfied with his own



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ability to dig deeper into an issue that, more-often-than-not, is presented as a “feel good” aspect of corporate strategy rather than a results-oriented function of success. That is when he decided to strike out on his own.

“I’d hear stories about companies who did great things for their employees,” says Pennington. “And, when you’d look at their performance, it was obvious that the strongest cultures were achieving the greatest results.”

Pennington is quick to point out that building a great culture isn’t just about setting corporate policies or implementing a new initiative.

“You can take similar policies and compare two different organizations—one with a strong culture and one with a marginal culture—and the differences in bottom-line results will astound you. There’s a Lexus Dealership in Texas that consistently ranks number one in service among Lexus dealerships. They also consistently rate among the best in sales and almost every other measured success category. And, they have a reputation for having a strong—unbelievably strong—culture. Lexus, as a national brand, is already known for its commitment to fantastic customer service. You can go to any Lexus dealership and receive great service. So, why is this dealership in Texas out-performing the rest? Why are their results so huge? Culture.”

So, can culture be created? Or, is it some sort of organic process where people instinctively seek like-personalities? Can a culture be managed—cultivated to achieve results?

“Some cultures are strategically

created,” says Pennington. “Others are more organic in nature. Southwest Airlines built its culture to be different in the marketplace. It was a strategic decision. But even then, those behaviors and attitudes of outrageous customer service took time and commitment to institutionalize. You can’t just say you have a great place to work. You can’t just say you have a high-performance culture. You have to actually do it. And, if you do it—whatever ‘it’ is—the messaging will follow. It is a fact of life—great brands began as great companies supported by great cultures.”

We’ve all probably experienced “lip service initiatives” at some point. And, maybe now when we’re the people implementing people strategies, we have a clearer appreciation of just how difficult it can be to truly engage employees and build cultures that get results. For instance, virtually everyone talks about hiring for fit. But, many still fall into the trap of looking at open positions as simply gaps that must be filled and accepting the first qualified person rather than waiting for the best candidate.

“Great companies pursue the best over the easiest,” says Pennington. “This is evident in product design, customer service, office design, procedures and systems. Why should it be different when it comes to people?”

And, this creates results?

“People create cultures by what they do, and how they behave,” says Pennington. “You can’t become someone else’s culture. To get results, you need to focus your resources in a direction that makes sense for you and your customers. If your culture is creative, where will

that lead you? If it’s high energy, what can your team accomplish? If it’s serious, process driven, and understated, how can you focus that energy to achieve results? One of the biggest pitfalls companies face is change. So, the ability to anticipate and embrace change must be part of the equation. Look what happened to the American Auto Industry. For many years, their culture of resisting change became a barrier to success. It is all about creating and reinforcing habits that generate results and set you apart in the hearts and minds of customers. Umm, how?

1. “Be honest,” says Pennington. “Every company has a culture. And, if you don’t know what defines your culture, ask your people. Ask open ended questions like: What would make this the ideal place to work? Or, what is it about our company that makes you look at other jobs? We know people are looking. Find out how your employees view your culture—how would they honestly describe it to their friends?”

2. “Communicate the goal,” says Pennington. “Employees at every level need to hear about where you want to be. The more people hear about it, the more people will begin to play to it. Obviously, do first, talk second. But, there’s no rule that you can’t talk about what you want the culture to be.”

3. “Use processes and measures to focus the energy,” says Pennington. “Communication and education sessions are important, but if you want to make something stick in the culture, build a process around it and measure success.”

4. “Realize it’s continuous,” he adds. “A culture is something that must be cultivated. It evolves and grows with your business and the external marketplace. A culture is a living organism. It exists whether you manage the evolution or not. So, give it the attention it deserves and it will serve you right.”

5. “Results rule,” Pennington concludes. “If your organization is not delivering the results you were hoping for, maybe your culture is not as strong as you think. It is time to reevaluate what you need to do to get those results.”

What’s the bottom line?

“If you’re walking into your CEO’s office to present a people strategy, go in talking about results. And, if you’re telling yourself you don’t have any yet, you’d be mistaken. Your culture, whatever it may be today, has already created results—and plenty of evidence either way that people strategies are what push businesses forward.”♦

About
Randy Pennington

Randy Pennington helps leaders and organizations build cultures focused on results, relationships, and accountability. He is a twenty-year business performance veteran, author, speaker, and consultant who has worked with many of this country’s best-known companies, associations, and government agencies. Additionally, he serves as an adjunct instructor in the Cox Business Leadership Center at Southern Methodist University.

Pennington is author of *Results Rule! Build a Culture that Blows the Competition Away* which received the 2007 Best Book Award from USA Book News. His first book, *On My Honor, I Will*, received endorsements from President Gerald Ford, Zig Ziglar, and Stephen Covey, Ph.D. Pennington’s ideas have been featured in *The New York Times*, *Entrepreneur*, *Executive Excellence*, on CNN, Fox News, the BBC, the ABC radio network, and in numerous professional and trade association journals.

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