

WHAT IF YOU'VE HIRED THE WRONG PERSON?

By Geoff Rodgers, President of Select Advantage

Finding the right person for the job can be a bit like finding a missing piece to a puzzle. You search for someone who is going to be just what you need: the perfect fit. Sometimes the applicant you hire is successful at the job. You end up with the fit you were looking for. Other times it can feel like helping your employee find success in the job is like trying to force a puzzle piece to fit somewhere that it just wasn't meant to.

Despite all your best efforts throughout the hiring process, sometimes you have new hires who struggle to meet the needs of the job.

Once you've identified the person is having difficulty performing the necessary job functions, you have to decide how you're going to proceed. Here are a few basic options:

- Identify the challenges the employee is facing and determine which ones, if any, can be developed and provide the remediation;
- Counsel the employee out of a job (AKA "fire" them); or
- Do nothing and hope it all works out. While we all know the definition of insanity is to keep repeating the same behavior and expecting a different outcome, this third option is often a typical response.

The question to ask yourself is, "Have I done everything I can to help the individual succeed?" An employee may be struggling in the job for a variety of reasons. Some of those reasons include job fit, the need for further training, being trained in a different learning style, personality conflicts within

the workplace, or personal struggles outside of work. You need to approach this conflict between your expectations and the employee's performance with the perspective, does this employee possess the skills to meet the needs of the job. If the answer is yes, here are some ideas for developing the struggling employee:

- *Discuss employee strengths/weaknesses:* The objective of this discussion is to communicate expectations on both sides of the table. Often, employees are harder on themselves than any supervisor ever could be. We recommend a 360° review program where both the employee and supervisor are given a level playing field. Discuss the employee's strengths and weaknesses and lay out an agreed-upon plan of action.
- *Spend more time with the employee:* The length of training programs for new employees may vary from several weeks to even a year. A key that may seem obvious, but can be easily overlooked, is making sure the training is sufficient for the employee to succeed. People are also varied in their learning styles. Some may need to learn differently to retain and apply what they have been taught.
- *Peer training:* Sometimes getting an experienced point of view, or engaging in a new learning environment, will help a struggling employee overcome a trouble spot. This is a great way to help an employee who is struggling in one particular area. Getting peers involved also helps existing employees to become invested in improving the struggling employee to be successful.

- *Raise or lower expectations:* Right or wrong, expectations do factor into whether someone succeeds or fails. Some people need to raise their expectations of struggling employees (expect more, so the employee rises to meet these expectations). Others may need to lower some of their expectations (evaluate if are you expecting too much from a new employee). Remember, each person learns and is motivated differently.
- *Skills training (if needed):* Once you have assessed the employee's weaknesses, you will need to evaluate if these are areas which can be developed. Sometimes extra training in a given area will change the "wrong person" to the "right" person. However, some parts of the job are not teachable and are traits the employee either brings with them or does not. We call these behaviors, and it is essential to consider that these non-teachable behaviors are an innate part of someone's approach to work and/or life. Traits such as leading by example, taking responsibility, and being a team player are some examples of these behaviors.
- *Find other ways to challenge/motivate the employee:* Everyone is motivated differently. Some employees find their motivation by being shown appreciation. Others need to complete a project. And, others by feeling connected to the vision and mission of the organization. If done well, motivated employees show incredible loyalty and increased production.

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in the employee, then they will never be successful. Either you need to change, or you need to make a change. If you have done everything possible to help the employee, yet still see them failing, then you are left with your second option—counseling an employee out of a job.

Counseling an Employee Out of a Job

The best way to counsel an employee out of a job is to have detailed documentation of performance deficits and remediation methods used. Most organizations do not have the documentation to validate the termination of an employee properly. Misunderstandings regarding employee termination can create poor morale, broken relationships with a union (if that is your environment), or even costly lawsuits. Therefore, if counseling an employee out of a job is the best option, it is recommended to include HR and/or legal counsel in that process.

The importance of discussing the employee's strengths and weaknesses with them has already been mentioned in this article. This performance review becomes the foundation to modify behavior and/or counsel the employee out of a job. The ideal objective of the performance review would be for the employee to alter their behavior. Unfortunately, this will not happen with every problem employee. In that case, if you can get them to realize the job is not a good fit, then many times they will choose to resign or move on.

What's needed is an unambiguous evaluation of employee performance against the core competencies required to be successful in the job. A job-specific evaluation will allow you to isolate the problem behavior(s) visibly. Typically, the performance evaluations present in many organizations are not used effectively, often enough, not job-specific, or do not specifically address the core competencies of the

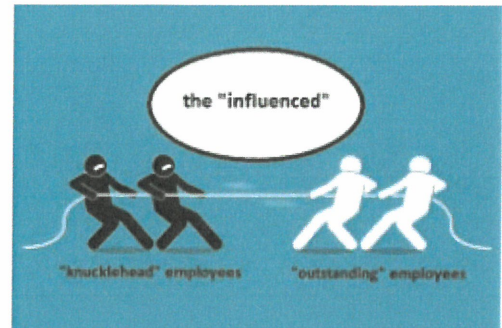
job. These components are all vital for documenting and stopping poor behavior in the workplace. Core competencies should come from an in depth understanding of the role and what it entails. Typical core competencies could include:

- Determination to see job responsibilities through to completion
- Leading by example
- Effective time management
- Ability to multi-task
- Owning responsibility for actions and decisions
- And many more...

Utilizing a thorough performance evaluation and documenting job performance regularly will reinforce the good behavior you are looking for, as well as what your organization values. It is recommended to evaluate on a quarterly basis, especially for those "problem employees." This approach also communicates the message that if they do not change there will be a difficult conversation coming soon. Ideally, the employee will change their behavior, or in some cases, they see the "writing on the wall" and choose to walk away.

How does not dealing with the "wrong person" affect the organization?

There is no need to be discouraged, help is available and solutions are possible. The reality is, in most organizations there are a small group of "outstanding" employees and a small group of what could be called "knucklehead" employees. In the middle is the larger group that could be called the "influenced" employees. Some days it may feel like your organization has a very large group of "knuckleheads" at work. This is the small group influencing those in the middle. The truth is, in most cases it is the dissension of only one or two employees causing the chaos or negative culture in the organization.



Likewise, the group of "outstanding" employees can have the same influence—if they feel supported by management.

By following the steps outlined in this article, you can isolate the problem employees' influence on the rest of the organization and shift the power of influence towards the outstanding employees. A work environment which allows the "knuckleheads" to influence the organization is headed for tough times. Being successful and effective requires dealing with the one or two problem employees by documenting their lack of job fit thoroughly, and therefore minimizing their negative voice in the organization.

The most important fact to remember is this: if you do not believe in the employee, then they will never be successful. Either you need to change, or you need to make a change. Are you going to do something to protect the rest of your staff, or are you going to keep doing the same things and expect different results? ●

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