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From Bud Haney's Desk

Why smart employees underperform

Everyone has an "off" day. Hopefully it doesn't last too long. If it persists, the bad day turns into a "rut," and that's a problem. In sports, it's called a slump. In the stock market, it's either a flat or downward trend.

Whatever you call it, it's not good.

It's so difficult to replace experienced workers, especially those who are seasoned or specialized in what they do. So don't give up on them too quickly. Find out what's going on and try to fix it.

Most managers aren't doctors or psychologists, but there are steps that anyone can follow to try to diagnose the cause of an underperforming employee. Once you know the problem, you can begin to help them recover.

I would guess that many underperforming employees aren't consciously slacking off and could be just as baffled by their downturn in production. Examine what has changed: The skills necessary for the job? A new boss or coworker? New goals? Or perhaps nothing has changed and the employee is no longer challenged by doing the same job day after day.

If you show your employees that they are valued and that you and the organization care about them, that is a vital step towards motivating them back to their usual productive selves.

Depending on the issue, the turnaround may take time – think of a large freighter on the ocean making a slow but steady

turn – but work with the employee to set goals and milestones to monitor improvement. But it's also important to remember that nothing is forever. If you and the employee have legitimately tried to correct the situation with insufficient improvement, perhaps it's time to amicably part ways.

It's unrealistic to expect that everyone has a perfect day every day. Bad days will happen, but coach your managers to watch for the slumps, and to know what to do to help the employee get back on track.

I invite you to read more about helping smart but underperforming employees in this month's newsletter from Profiles International. As always, I wish you continued success!

Sincerely,



Bud Haney, President
Profiles International

FROM OUR CLIENTS

Thinking differently about performance—The ProfileXT® assessment is helping the client and their employees to rid themselves of the baggage of poor performance.

"If you use the numbers, Profiles brings some rigor to truly identifying top performers." Previously, managers often relied on the cult of personality when the time came to find an employee to fit a role. "Everybody has a favorite and is enamored by certain people's personalities. [By using the PXT], we can be more objective about it." The company, experienced at using different assessments and integrating them for its needs, sees the improvement curve rising with their use—especially through the integration of assessments "not just from a technology standpoint, but at a conceptual level," noted the performance consultant. "We bring all of our assessments together to talk about the whole person. We do that in teams, too."

In the future, Profiles will work with this client to look at ROI, sales projections, succession planning, and an individual contributor development assessment as well as team analysis for supervisors, which helps leaders see how they match or differ from others. "This can help ensure effective relationships among people," he noted. The PXT will be a mainstay in those discussions.

"It is an immutable law in business that words are words, explanations are explanations, promises are promises but only performance is reality." -Harold Geneen

FEATURE ARTICLE

Why Smart Employees Underperform: 7 Hazards to Avoid

1. Inadequate capability

Capability refers to the skills, tools, and experience that a person needs in order to successfully perform her job. When any of these factors are missing, there is an increased chance that the employee will underperform. It isn't uncommon for hiring professionals to overlook these basic factors, especially if a candidate has solid academic credentials and comes across as intelligent and confident in a job interview. Furthermore, it's no secret that most candidates exaggerate their abilities on their résumés and job applications.

Diagnostics that help you identify if an underperforming employee has adequate capability:

- **Skills**- Do you know what skills are needed to perform the job and whether the employee possesses those skills? If she doesn't possess the necessary skills, how will you help her acquire them, and how long do you expect that process to take? Skills training takes time and money, and results are never guaranteed unless there is adequate commitment from both the manager and the employee.
- **Tools**—Even if an individual has the skills and experience to do the job, does he have the tools to deliver peak performance? For example, a highly skilled and experienced web designer can't build a website without adequate computer hardware and software. The tools don't have to be the most up-to-date, but a system that crashes can be incredibly frustrating and unproductive, even to the best performer.
- **Experience**—Just because an employee has the skills to do a job doesn't mean that he has the experience to apply those skills in his specific position. This is especially true for recent graduates, outside hires from different industries, and internal hires from different departments.

2. Poor job fit

Many people fall into the trap of choosing a profession or job that is a bad fit. We are who we are. Our "mental DNA" is influenced by both our genetics and our early life experiences, and it is almost completely formed by the time we are 20 years old. Rather than trying to understand ourselves so that we can choose a calling that builds on our strengths and aligns with our interests, we choose jobs because of peer pressure and societal influences.

It is important to understand a person's innate behaviors and interests when trying to match him with the right job. Know the job, know what type of person is successful in that job, and then hire others who have the behavioral traits that fit that job. This is easier said than done because it is difficult to gauge behaviors in a job interview, but behavioral assessments can be extremely helpful to close this gap.

3. Fuzzy goals and accountabilities

Employees need to be very clear about their responsibilities and about the results you expect them to achieve. Daily work and priorities are easily affected by the crisis of the day, new requests, or changes in direction. Setting and tracking *smart* goals helps your employees focus on what is most important to your business, and clear accountabilities help ensure that the work gets done with minimal conflict.

4. Poor relationship with manager

Managers and employees who understand each other's preferred styles will better understand how to communicate and work together effectively. We have identified seven factors that strongly predict the compatibility between a manager and her workers: self-assurance, self-reliance, conformity, optimism, decisiveness, objectivity, and approach to learning. Assessing a manager and her employees allows her to use objective information about herself and her workers so that they can work more effectively toward a common goal.

5. Poor relationship with coworkers

There are four primary factors that harm relationships among coworkers:

- Insensitivity toward others
- Unclear accountabilities
- Poor cultural fit
- Incompatible styles

6. Health and wellness issues

Approximately \$260 billion in output is lost each year in the US because of health-related problems. Whether they are absent from work altogether, or present but working at a reduced capacity, employees suffering from physical or mental illness have difficulty performing at their peak.

7. Physical and environmental factors

Numerous behavioral studies have proven that a pleasant and comfortable work environment improves worker productivity and reduces turnover.

For example, indoor temperature affects several human responses, including thermal comfort, perceived air quality, sick building syndrome symptoms, and performance at work. Researchers in Finland showed that when the interior air temperature was 30 degrees C, worker performance was 8.9% below worker performance at the optimal temperature of 22 degrees C.

DID YOU KNOW?

Source -LLS Acadamy

As the graph below shows, the number 1 reason employees often underperform (two years running I might add) is the employee felt overloaded and didn't have enough time to finish all tasks. The second reason (aside from 'other') was that basic job expectations were not made clear.

Single Biggest Barrier Faced in Fulfilling Job Responsibilities

