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EMPLOYER'S
ADVANTAGE
NEWSLETTER

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From Jim Sirbasku's Desk

Reorganize, Redeploy, Ready for Comeback

Leaders taking stock of their organizations are breathing sighs of relief: Layoffs and other cost-saving maneuvers are in place to ease the bottom line, only the most efficient workers remain on the payroll, and the current employees are more than capable of getting the job done.

Whoa! While you may think that reducing your workforce is the most difficult part of the job, your work is not yet finished. Now you have to ensure that the company's most important work continues to be done.

Leaders mistakenly believe that the employees who remain after a layoff will work harder because they are grateful that they still have a job. This is not necessarily so. In fact, many will feel bitter and overwhelmed because their workload has increased. At the same time, they struggle with the fear that they might be the next to lose their jobs. Uncertain times call for even stronger leadership.

Just as decision makers cannot afford to think that nothing else will change once the workforce is reduced, they must also ensure that remaining workers understand that change is inevitable. You must decide how to redeploy workers to other duties and how to upgrade their training even when the development budget is gone. You need a plan that ensures the company will keep going amidst the downturn. This task is easier if you understand your workers' strengths, weaknesses and interests.

Asking the following questions can lead you to the right answers as you retrain your employees to use their full potential in this new landscape.

- **Is the structure of our organization aligned with our business goals and strategies?** Remember, every task requires someone to perform it. Employees can and should multi-task, but expectations must be realistic. Make sure that you're not piling all the weight on the shoulders of one or two employees. Ask yourself which duties are daily necessities and which can go undone for a day, a week, or longer. Some tasks may not be completed until the economy improves. Create a written plan that outlines the necessary duties and who will be responsible for them.
- **Are our departmental goals consistent with our business goals?** Is one part of our company doing business the same old way while the world changes around it? Are we still ordering the most expensive supplies in one department while another department makes do? Are we using the most efficient ordering process? Are our customer service representatives working at the most logical times of the day? Communication can be uneven in both large and small organizations, but all departments must grasp the message that we are not doing business as usual. Changing only some parts of a business is like changing only half the spark plugs in your car.
- **Are our job goals consistent with our departmental goals?** Once a department has realigned itself with the goals of the business, we must examine individual job descriptions to make sure employees are performing essential tasks instead of those that can be done later—or not at all. Remember, change is the byword. This may require retraining and frequent reminders to employees who have always done things a certain way.
- **Do we have redundant accountabilities?** Are two employees, perhaps in different departments or working on different shifts, doing the same job? Examine what each employee is doing and find a new purpose for those employees whose tasks are redundant.

(continued)

"Excellent firms don't believe in excellence, only in constant improvement and constant change."

– Tom Peters, management consultant

**"Those who are blessed with the most talent don't necessarily outperform everyone else.
It's the people with follow-through who excel."**

– Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay cosmetics company

- **Do we have accountability gaps?** Job descriptions must cover all tasks essential to getting the work done. Example: Joe Smith picked up the company mail every morning. When Joe took an early retirement, no one was assigned to this simple but necessary function because it was not in a job description. The most important functions must be written into job descriptions so that when employees leave, important tasks still are done.
- **Do we know how much each employee is utilized?** Measuring utilization ensures that employees are completing the tasks that lead to the organization's success instead of focusing on the non-essential functions. Organizations lose money when workers neglect the "have-to-dos" because they are not making good use of their time.
- **Do we know what makes people successful in their jobs?** We might think we know our employees, but assessments give us objective measurements that detail employee motivation. If you have the wrong person in a job, you will see the results in her productivity, which ultimately affects the bottom line. Don't rely on your gut to give you the right answers about what your employees require to stay interested, engaged and productive.
- **Do we know our people's interests, talents and capabilities?** Many organizations fall into the trap of seeing potential as a panacea, assuming that someone who is excellent at one job will do well in almost any role. This is not so.

Instead of guessing that Joe Smith can manage a sales team because he is an excellent salesperson, measure his skills and interests objectively.

- **Do we provide effective opportunities for growth?** Even if your leadership development budget is limited, you can keep your future leaders engaged by helping them learn and grow in their roles through special assignments, mentoring and other opportunities. Online learning classes are an effective, less expensive way to train those who have growth potential. Remember to protect your investment in your top performers; even in an economic downturn, you need to plan for the future by attracting, engaging and retaining talent. Think long-term.
- **Do we tolerate disengaged employees and negative attitudes?** Poor performers and those with poor attitudes stand out more when workforces are reduced. Gallup estimates that actively disengaged workers cost the American economy up to \$350 billion per year. Remember that a bad apple can spoil the whole batch. Can you afford even one?

All organizations are facing this difficult downturn of unknown length. Our goal is to emerge with strength, poised for the comeback. Ensuring that everyone is doing the right job, and that the most important jobs are done, will help us meet that goal.

*Jim Sirbasku, CEO
Profiles International*



"A complete job description goes beyond listing the duties that go with a job title. A complete job description has to describe the attributes of the person who will perform the job in an extraordinary manner because he or she has the right brain power, the right behavioral traits, and the right occupational interests for the job."

– From the book *40 Strategies for Winning in Business* by Bud Haney and Jim Sirbasku

STRATEGIES FOR WINNING: Buried Treasure*

Who Knows What's Hidden Right Under Your Nose?

In the 1970s, the Dallas Cowboys football team adopted the philosophy of drafting the best athletes they could find, some of whom did not have any college football experience. In the process, they found genuine talent that everyone else in the National Football League had overlooked. In the long run, however, the Cowboys decided it was more productive to focus on drafting football players who had already proven themselves on the football field.

We see that many businesses have designed their selection processes in a similar manner: They almost always hire good people, but they place some of these people in positions for which they are ill suited. Perhaps you've heard someone say, "He looked good in uniform, but he couldn't play." That's a way of saying that an employee appeared to have all the attributes for success in a particular job, but didn't perform up to expectations. Everyone has hired and promoted people who turned out to be disappointments. The number of times we have heard about top salespeople who became lousy sales managers is painful. That mistake occurs because neither the company nor the employee has a clear understanding of what it takes to become an outstanding sales manager. Oh, sure, the company has a job description in a file somewhere that the sales manager could dust off and read if he or she wanted to, but traditional job descriptions are inadequate today.

A Personal Story from Bud Haney

We all subscribe to the idea that our people are among our greatest assets, recognizing that outstanding organizations tend to have superior people policies and, on the face of it, superior people. Accordingly, many of us spend a huge amount of time chasing the rainbow, convinced that we will find a pot full of those perfect people at the end of it. Instead, we should be focusing on identifying the potential of those who already make up our teams. And therein lies the secret of those organizations with a people-based competitive advantage—it's not just that they identify and recruit great people (although that does help), but that they work with the people they have to make them great, to find their unique attributes that can be developed and employed effectively within the organization, and to build the sort of serious competitive advantage that only good people can confer.

Find the pattern in this series of numbers: 8, 11, 15, 5, 14, 1, 7, 6, 10, 13, 3, 12, 2. If you're stumped, you'll find the answer at the bottom of this chapter. Once you've looked at it, read on.

So what? Well, the simple point is that looking at the familiar in an entirely different way can sometimes produce results that we scarcely expect. Your people

are like that—you assume that because you've worked with them for awhile, you know what they are and what they're capable of. That's true, but only to a point. Uncovering genuine hidden potential requires a shift in the way you evaluate your people.

Take the following actions to get started.

1. Uncover Your Team's Career Goals, Aspirations, Likes/Dislikes, and Strengths/Weaknesses

You can't begin this process without knowing a lot about each member of your team. Start by talking with them regularly. Find out what they like to do. Research published in a 1999 Harvard Business Review showed that people excel at jobs that interest them more than they excel at jobs that seem to be a good fit for their education, skills or experience. Find out what your people enjoy doing, their career plans, and their business and life aspirations. Don't limit yourself to informal chats. Use more formal means like the Profiles Checkpoint Multi-Rater System, and psychometric assessments like the ProfileXT, to determine the particular strengths of your key assets. The authors of the HBR research cited above put it perfectly: "...the best way to keep your stars is to know them better than they know themselves – and then use that information to customize the career of their dreams."

2. Make Better Use of Strengths

When you feel like you have a good grasp of each team member's strengths, start looking for new ways to use them. Brainstorm ways to apply these strengths in new and imaginative ways that enhance the roles of each of your people and that address problems that you haven't previously been able to address. In one successful example we recently observed in the IT industry, a talented project manager was put into the role of sales manager, not because she knew an awful lot about sales or had a gleaming sales record—quite the contrary—but because she was particularly good at organizing campaigns, marshalling resources, motivating her team to action, and seeing initiatives through to the end. Take off the blinders when it comes to applying strengths in new ways.

3. Turn Weaknesses into Strengths

In the movie *Enemy of the State*, Gene Hackman tells Will Smith, "...in guerrilla warfare you gotta turn your strengths into weaknesses...if they're big and you're small, then you're fast and they're slow...you've got to work with what you've got." You must do the same with your people. Look at those characteristics that you currently perceive as shortcomings, and then look at situations where those attributes might be utilized to your advantage. After all, most weaknesses are just overused strengths.

For example, a customer service representative who's just too assertive to "put up or shut up" with angry customers may actually make a very successful salesperson, capable of overcoming objections not easily overcome by others. Consider the marketing executive who comes up with killer campaigns but just can't seem to follow them through to the end. Focus that person solely on developing the creative campaigns and assign project management and completion to someone better suited. Look at every shortcoming you currently perceive in your team members, determine where a weakness might become a strength, and figure out how you can capitalize upon it. You'll be amazed at the results.

4. Feedback, Feedback, Feedback

In a recent study, 25 percent of employees said that one of their main reasons for changing jobs was lack of feedback from management about their performance. Make it a formal objective to provide positive feedback on a job well done to every one of your people at least weekly. This requires you and your management team to actively seek opportunities to provide feedback. Not only does this increase the interest level in the job being done (we all like to be recognized), but it also helps to reinforce positive behavior and performance at the expense of negative alternatives. Also, experience shows that when you provide

feedback to the team, they'll provide feedback to you. If you've been searching for a competitive advantage, then the answer just might be under your nose. Before you start exploring more exotic sources, look at the people who are driving your company right now. You'll find untold treasure buried behind those familiar faces you see every day.

Pattern in the numbers?

If you are familiar with numbers and number-series puzzles, you are probably naturally inclined to calculate the mathematical relationship between 8 and 11, and then between 11 and 15, and so on until you can speculate as to the mathematical progression – and there is none! The numbers are arranged alphabetically!

Your people are so familiar to you, but if you look at them a little differently, you can learn an awful lot more about what can make them great for you and your organization. (Thanks to Donna Engelson of Profiles National Capital for this teaser.)

**From the book 40 STRATEGIES FOR WINNING IN BUSINESS by Bud Haney and Jim Sirbasku. © S&H Publishing Co., 5205 Lake Shore Drive, Waco, Texas 76710-1732. All rights reserved. Contact S&H Publishing Co., (254) 751-1644, for reprint permission.*

"Efficiency is doing better what is already being done." – Peter Drucker, human organization expert

PRODUCT FOCUS: Happy Engagement with WorkForce Analysis Profile™

See Rachel, the engaged employee. She arrives for work smiling and immediately starts in on her tasks for the day. Whether the chore is big or small, she completes it efficiently and never watches the clock. If you need a volunteer for a new and difficult job, Rachel is the first to raise her hand. Her involvement and enthusiasm encourage others to give their best possible performances.

Now see Susan. She comes in without saying hello or even glancing at anyone else. She grabs a cup of coffee and immediately disappears, returning to her desk 30 minutes later. Before starting her work, she makes a personal phone call. She leaves for lunch early without finishing the report on her desk that another department requested ASAP.

You know that both employees are capable and that they both arrived on the first day of work with the same potential, but one went off the track at some point. You'll have no problem choosing which employee to dismiss if cuts are inevitable, but it is even more important to know from the outset how to work with Rachel and Susan to build a highly engaged and productive workforce.

WorkForce Analysis Profile™ provides the answer.

The WAP provides decision makers with insight into an employee's attitude toward work and reveals how important her work is to her. It gives managers information about an employee's job needs and job preferences, as well as key motivators to use with each worker. Such knowledge is crucial when building a productive workplace.

WorkForce Analysis Profile reveals employee attitudes about:

- employers
- current managers
- job functions

When decision makers have this information, they can create a team of workers who enjoy what they do and see the benefits of their work, which positively impacts your bottom line. Think of WorkForce Analysis Profile™ as part of the operating manual for understanding the modern worker.

Do you need to know how to work with the Rachels, the Susans, and the others who make up your team? WorkForce Analysis Profile™ provides the necessary knowledge. To find out more, call Profile Strategies at (800) 406-0087.

CASE STUDY: Top Challenges for Texas Businesses, 2009

In a recent survey conducted by Profiles International to obtain a clear understanding of current business challenges and trends in Texas, leaders said that increasing employee performance and developing internal talent are their main people challenges. Here are some of the findings:

Our top people challenges include (ranked in order of importance):

- Increasing employee performance throughout the organization
- Developing internal talent to meet business needs
- Maintaining engagement in the midst of business changes
- Retaining key people in the organization

The effects of the economic climate on our hiring plans mean:

- We are more likely to hire an experienced worker than a new graduate (66 percent)
- We find that recruiting top talent is easier (60 percent)
- Retaining executives is easier (57 percent)
- We expect to reduce our hiring in 2009 (53 percent)

The top people/talent issues faced by my organization are:

- Increasing sales effectiveness (50 percent)
- Individual employee productivity (45 percent)
- Achieving greater results with fewer resources (42 percent)

Compiled from 2009 Texas Business Survey, "The Economic Downturn: Surviving and Thriving in Texas," conducted by Profiles International in partnership with Sam Houston State University.

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