



BY STAN POHMER

WHO ARE YOUR EINSTEINS?

Having employees is one thing, but having employees who love what they do and are happy is a whole different ballgame.

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I was recently working with a garden center owner on a strategic repositioning. Since it was his fiscal year end, he was in the process of giving annual performance reviews to employees, and he asked me to sit in on a few of them. This gave me the opportunity to re-think the whole performance review process and draw some insights I'd like to share that might make a positive difference for you.

REVIEW PROCESS

The process that was used in the garden center above is very common. First, the employee is asked to do a pre-review that involved identifying his/her major accomplishments achieved during the course of the year; acknowledging the projects and goals that were set the prior year that were not attained; identifying his/her strengths and weaknesses on a professional and personal level; and suggesting goals, training and projects for the following year. The owner then writes up his own perspective of the employee's performance, and the two of them formally meet to discuss the past performance and action plans and goals for the coming year.

One quick comment...there should never be any surprises between what the employee has on his/her pre-review and what the owner identifies in his final review. There should be regular benchmarking and feedback

during the course of the year to allow for re-focusing and changing emphasis and direction of goals, based on changing circumstances, and everyone should always know where they stand, both good and bad.

Now, there's supposed to be a balance in the strengths and the weaknesses noted (I hate that word...why not look at these as "opportunities?"). But during the review, there's always a tendency to focus more attention on the weaknesses than the strengths; the employer observed probably spent 80 percent of the time, discussion and energies talking about the negatives and putting plans of action in place to correct them during the next year. I admit that everyone has traits, characteristics and skills that can be improved upon and some essential or critical behaviors that must be learned for your organization to function. But each individual also brings unique strengths that can be leveraged and improved upon that can add real value to a company, honing these strengths to achieve even greater successes and contributions, yet these aren't the main focus of the development process.

NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR

It's human nature to focus on the negatives; they're easier to identify and easier to address. But academic studies have shown that it takes far more time, effort and resources to correct and

improve negative behaviors than it does to positively leverage strengths or positive behaviors. And, from a morale standpoint, none of us like to be told we're inadequate, and we aren't performing well. But we all love to be told the things we're doing right and shown ways to do more of the things we like to do and do well. Negative focus creates frustration, fear and anxiety; positive focus creates excitement, energy and renewed commitment to growth and success. Which message are you sending in your daily interaction with your employees?

It's been said that Albert Einstein, the noted physicist, couldn't tie his own shoes; he didn't know how and didn't want to take the time to learn...he simply couldn't be bothered with this task because it wasn't important to him. Someone could have forced the issue, telling him that he couldn't start his research work until he learned or actually tied his shoes, frustrating him and keeping him away from the theoretical thinking that he liked to do and excelled in. Or, someone could have compensated for this "inadequacy," tying his shoes for him or giving him loafers to wear and allowing him to focus on his innate strengths and desires to do other things that were more important and of more lasting value. It would have been a loss to mankind if time was spent trying to correct the "negative behavior" of not being able to tie his own

shoes, preventing him from creating $e=mc^2$ — the cornerstone of nuclear energy!

Granted, this is an extreme example, but is it really? The message here is that we need to stop doing the things we aren't good at and don't like to do, and do more of the things we are good at and enjoy doing to reach our potential. And that potential will never be attained if we focus on the negatives.

As a manager, you are a coach of individual employees, each with their own unique strengths and opportunities, skill sets, likes and dislikes, motivators and demotivators, but you need to field a strong and balanced team in order for you to reach your goals. You could try to make everyone the same, clones of one another, each with identical traits and behaviors, but that would mean focusing all of their ener-

gies on correcting their different negative behaviors or skills, not maximizing their individual strengths. Which approach do you think would benefit the individuals, build your team and achieve your company's goals most effectively?

UTILIZING SKILLS

A 5-foot 2-inch basketball player will never be a center; he doesn't possess the skills and would be unsuccessful, completely frustrated and demoralized if forced to play that position. But he may have the skills and desire to be the best ball handler in the league. As the coach, do you capitalize on and develop his skills and help him reach his potential as the team's ball handler? You still need a center, but you can either draft/hire one or develop the skills of the tall guy in the back room who isn't playing ball

yet and just might appreciate the new challenge.

It's the manager's responsibility to identify the individual characteristics and skills of each team member and then mold each of them into what's needed to accomplish your goals. We have to learn to develop all of the strengths and find out how to compensate for each other's shortcomings. You most likely already have the team in place to reach your goals; the challenge is identifying and developing the strengths of the individuals to help you get there the fastest and most effective way. And when people are in their own element, doing the things they can succeed at, the things they enjoy doing, the things that they have fun developing, just watch their energy and productively soar!

By the way, this process applies to managers, too. If you hate

accounting but love working with people, stop doing the accounting work or do less of it. Outsource it, hire someone or find someone else in your organization who enjoys doing that kind of work or wants to learn how and give them the tools to develop. You'll be less stressed, more productive and have the time to do what you do best...develop your team. And your team won't have to avoid you anymore when they see you coming out of the office after reviewing your ledgers for fear that you'll take your frustration out on them!

So who's the Einstein in your company? 🐘

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