

## Attend to the talent

By *Jeremy Miller*

### **The secret to success is to Surround yourself with the right team, and focus on its performance**

The challenge of a transition from a solo performer to a manager is like a move from single life to life as a parent. The focus shifts from the individual to the needs of others. The technical skills and knowledge that propel us up the corporate ladder are not the main attributes of a great manager. A few characteristics emerge when observing a great manager in action. They aren't trendy, they just seem to work.

#### **Hire great people**

There is nothing more important to a manager's success than to hire and retain great people. A leader with a weak team is forced to not only do all of his or her work, but the work of his or her team too. It is a draining and defeating experience. By surrounding yourself with the right people, you will propel yourself, your team and your company forward.

Talented people have many options, and they look for opportunities to push their careers forward. Great managers don't expand their team with people to simply perform tasks; they create careers. By looking at what a position must accomplish in three, six and 24 months into the future, you can identify the key attributes and skills needed to succeed in the job. This understanding lets the manager set the right criteria to select the best and provide the language and direction to articulate the career path and objectives for the role.

To get the best people, great managers don't wait for candidates to be delivered to them; they are proactive. You may have all the intentions in the world to hire the best, but if you only see the mediocre in your sourcing efforts, you can't hire the best. Recruiting top talent is an ongoing process, and you must always be on the hunt for great people. Forecast your needs up to six months in advance, and begin shaking the trees to identify potential candidates. Collect names and business cards at trade shows, association meetings and from your employees. Work to contact and develop relationships with these candidates for future hiring needs.

#### **Set clear expectations**

Great managers focus on the end results, not on the steps it takes to get there. They don't exhaust themselves by telling their employees how to do their jobs.

Focus your team on the finish line, or the targeted objective, and paint a clear picture that everyone can "buy" into. Take the time to make sure each team member can visualize as well as articulate what the end result should look like and why. You may do this in a structured planning event, such as an annual goal-setting meeting. Other times it can be an informal conversation about how to handle a specific challenge. Employees need to know what they are expected to do, and they need to have the room to execute the details in a way that makes the most sense to them. The hardest thing for most new managers is to release their tight grip and accept that their employees will not do the job the same way they would.

The act of defining objectives and giving your employees the freedom to achieve the desired results delivers a powerful trio: empowerment, trust and ownership. By trusting and believing in the talents of your people, you help them achieve their full potential in the pursuit of the clearly defined outcome. Remember, you are being judged on the performance of your team. At the beginning of a project everyone is excited about the opportunity and what he or she is going to accomplish. The real challenge is to keep up that motivation throughout the project. You need to find and exploit every way possible to engage and energize your team to reach its final destination.

#### **Find each person's talents**

Every role performed at optimum requires certain behaviours, feelings and skills. Talent is natural and innate; it cannot be taught. Great managers watch their employees to see what they do best. They talk with their staff about what brings them joy at work, what frustrates them and what really motivates them.

Marcus Buckingham states in *First, Break All The Rules*, "One of the signs of a great manager is the ability to describe, in detail, the unique talents of each of his or her people — what drives each one, how each one thinks, how each builds relationships." A great manager uses this knowledge to leverage the individual talents of his or her people, and to deepen the overall strength of the group to reach its defined outcomes.

**Recognize efforts at least weekly**

Communicate. Humans are social creatures and thrive on personal interaction and reinforcement. We want to know our actions are being recognized and that we are on the right track. The quickest way to snuff out motivation and creativity at work is to ignore it. Notice the little things and always be looking for an opportunity to give feedback.

Performance reviews are a great way to examine annual targets, but outstanding performance is developed in day-to-day interactions with your people. In conjunction with annual reviews, set monthly and quarterly targets to help your people achieve and be recognized for their ongoing accomplishments toward the final outcome.

In the book Nuts, Jackie and Kevin Freiberg state, "Ownership isn't about equity; it's about bringing something to the table — ideas, skills, and talents that others value and appreciate. When people feel involved, they care more. The more they care, the more willing they are to assume ownership." Through constant feedback and recognition you empower employees to take ownership for their actions and to be confident they are on the right track.

**Know your employees, show you care**

Employees have options, and they could work elsewhere, but they choose to invest their time and talents into your company's success. Great managers take an interest in the personal lives of their employees. They don't pry, but they listen to the stories about their employees' families and hobbies to get a better appreciation for their outside lives. Two-thirds of our lives are spent outside work, and the events and priorities outside the office have a great impact on the performance in the office. Employees who feel part of a caring team are more committed to doing good work and staying on a job for a longer period of time.

**Be open and truthful**

Trust must be earned and deserved. One can love, hate or respect someone without the feeling being mutual. The same is not true for trust. You and your employees must participate and reciprocate to build this relationship of trust over time.

Building a trusting relationship with your team involves emotion as well as intellect. Talk with your people daily. Look for changes in behaviour, the working environment and the overall mood in the organization. Always look for opportunities to communicate with your team. Keep your team members up to date on changes that will impact them. Too often managers do not want to communicate upcoming changes or negative news, because they want to protect their team.

Remember, the social grapevine moves at a blistering pace, and failure to communicate will always catch up with you. Clear and direct communication is the foundation of a trusting relationship.

Managers get their results through other people. By surrounding yourself with the right team and focusing and empowering your people to arrive at the final destination, you will be able to achieve incredible results.

There is an often-used quote, "People don't leave companies, they leave managers." Applying the characteristics of top managers and focusing on the performance of your team will lay the foundation for your company's success. Your leadership style is a key link for success by setting the tone and motivation for your team.

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