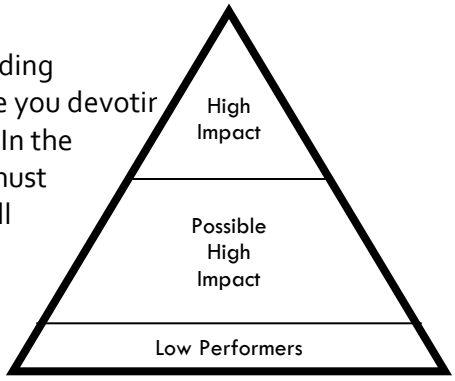
REWARD YOUR HIGH IMPACT PEOPLE—DON'T PUNISH THEM FOR BEING GREAT!

America is the land of equality. All people are created equal. But at work, some are more equal than others. If you treat them all the same, you're making a big mistake. If your situation is similar to most other managers, you probably are fortunate in that you have at least a few high impact people working for you. Most of your staff probably are *possible* high impact people. And, unless you are really fortunate, you may have a low performer or two. The high impact folks will make a big impact for you. Some of the possible high impact people may be capable of being developed into high impact players. At the worst, they should be able to work dependably and not create significant problems. Meanwhile, you must deal with the low performers. If you don't, you put your organization and your career at risk.

So, how are you managing your people? Are you spending enough time with your high impact employees? Or are you devotir too much time and attention to your low performers? In the past, we have labored under the assumption that we must fix our organizational weaknesses, and that we must all concentrate on fixing weaknesses—both ours and the weaknesses of others who work for us. But that may not be the best way to approach our business challenges.



HIGH IMPACT EMPLOYEES

These people have a combination of talent, knowledge, skills and attitude that allow them to excel. With proper management and grooming, they can be your next line of leadership. Without proper management, they are bright enough to find better opportunities with your competitors.

Abused or Rewarded?

Do you reward your high impact people with recognition, pay and developmental opportunities, or do you punish them? Of course, you don't deliberately punish them, but do you look to them to pick up the slack of the low performers? I've often seen high impact players burned out by their bosses loading more and more responsibilities on them simply because the high performers can get the work done. Never mind that the additional duties are not the highest and best use of their time, and that these additional assignments get in the way of their career development. Or that the more someone else shirks their duties, the more the high impact employees must take on.

Ignored or Appreciated?

Do you show your high impact team members how much you appreciate them, or do you assume that, since they're doing such a good job, you don't need to tell them what a good job they are doing? High impact contributors need affirmation too. If these people represent the best of your construction company, shouldn't you spend a lot of time with them, helping them further develop their skills and tapping into their potential?

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Involvement and Participation
And how involved are your high impact personnel in the big picture at your company? Most of my senior executive clients are extremely bright and capable, with a high degree of confidence in their own ideas. They are high impact individuals who have self-actualized. Somewhere along the way, though, some of these contractors forgot about the need of their own high impact people for involvement and participation. Contractors who don't provide adequate involvement and participation are losing out on the value-added contributions that these people can bring to the table.

Appropriate Delegation
High impact personnel typically require less micromanagement than the other people in your organization. Having said that, you may need to adjust your style of delegation when you assign tasks to them, and you may need to more closely support them in those new tasks. But be ready to step back once they've mastered the activity.

Challenges and Stretching
High impact employees thrive on challenges and assignments that cause them to stretch and grow. If you keep them bottled up doing the some old thing, you are not meeting their need for growth and development. If they are bored, they will find challenges at another construction company.

POSSIBLE HIGH IMPACT EMPLOYEES

These people have the potential to be high impact employees. They need more structure, though, combined with training and development to surface their strengths.

Reasonable, Clear Expectations
Contractors need to set reasonable and clear expectations for all of their people. This is a particularly important factor for possible high impact employees. Contractors must be reasonable in what they expect from their people. In this day and age of doing more with less, it is increasingly difficult to expect a lot of change in what people do without changing what they do. For many contractors, their processes today represent an amalgam of incremental changes added to "the way we do things." Being short handed makes it difficult for your people to perform at their best. Conducting work "the way we've always done it" often creates unnecessary steps that further stifle productivity.

And in my experience, many top managers fall prey to the "JPTB" syndrome. This acronym stands for "just push the button." The manager wants an activity report sorted out by customer or department, for example, and tells the employee to, "just print it off"—just push the button and it will happen. In reality, if the existing system does not allow for a simple, quick solution, it can take the employee and others hours to get the information that the manager wants. This then becomes an unrealistic expectation. If contractors expect their all of their commands to simply be carried out with the push of a button, they are not in touch with reality.

A contractor also needs to clearly explain what exactly is expected and when it is due. Note that the emphasis here should be on results, rather than methods. Furthermore, unless your people

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know what success looks like, how do you expect them to be successful? Don't tell them that you can't define what you are looking for, but that you will know it when you see it. Mind reading is not a commonly found trait in the business world.

Training
Make sure that your possible high impact employees receive training in the technical or functional aspects of their jobs, as well as your organization's procedures—the "XYZ Co. Way." Provide them with the skill sets to be successful. Guard against the common tendency to use a "sink-or-swim" approach with your possible high potentials.

Performance feedback
Due to the prevalent practice of providing annual performance reviews, which often are of questionable value and usually are abhorred by both managers and employees, many contractors abdicate their responsibility for giving feedback to their employees on a routine basis. Feedback provides the information needed for a course correction from time to time. All feedback is good, but some feedback is just harder to take than other feedback. A good manager provides balanced feedback to help employees develop their strengths. Unless a manager tells her employees what they're doing well and what they could improve on, how can she expect them to change their behaviors and improve their performance?

Accountability
Today in our society, there is too much emphasis on sustaining self-esteem, and too little emphasis on accountability. People build self-esteem through a process of mastery that builds on successes. Hold your people accountable for results—not just the possible high impact people, but all of them. Possible high impact people need the additional structure of externally imposed accountability.

Teach Them about Goal-Setting and Measurement
One of the competencies that separates superior management and professional performers from average performers is known as "achievement orientation." A person with a highly developed achievement orientation competency is constantly measuring himself against goals, tracking his progress and successes. Some people are more naturally inclined toward this achievement competency, but possible high impact employees can learn to become more oriented toward goal-setting and performance measurement.

Problem Solving and Decision Making
While these seem to be basic skills for anyone, they don't seem to be widely taught outside the business environment. Possible high impact employees can benefit from a seasoned manager's insight into mental models for identifying problems and making good decisions. Similarly, teach your people how to handle crises in their jobs. As they move up, this will become a more important part of their jobs.

The Right Tools and People
Asking anyone to do a job without the right tools is a recipe for disaster. Don't expect a person to move thousands of yards of dirt with a shovel. Don't expect state of the art performance meas-

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urements if you are relying solely on a low end accounting package for your accounting and management information needs.

In the same vein, don't expect your people to deliver exceptional results if they don't have the right people in the right positions. Contractors need to help their possible high impact employees learn how to select, train and develop their people.

Low Performers

Performance problems typically are the result of one of three causes: 1) The employee doesn't have the knowledge and skills to do the job correctly; 2) The employee simply doesn't have the capacity for that part of the job; or 3) The employee has a bad attitude about it—he doesn't want to do it.

Lack of Knowledge and Skills

How do you determine what is actually causing the problem? Try consultant and author Bob Mager's test: Could the employee do it if you held a gun to his head? If he could, then it is an attitude problem. If he couldn't, then it is either lack of knowledge and skills or lack of capacity. Training should solve the problem. If after repeated attempts it does not, then you must think about the capacity issue.

Lack of Capacity

What I am talking about here is the basic ability to do the job once training has occurred. For example, some people have a phobia about doing work with numbers and truly are not good at it. Are you trying to fit a round, artistic peg, into a square, bean-counting hole? Another example of lack of capacity has to do with personal temperament and styles. If you are looking for a gregarious, outgoing people person, should you really expect them to work alone for long periods of time, poring over lists of routine details where accuracy is important? This usually doesn't work, either.

Bad Attitude

Once you've ruled out the other two possible causes of performance problems, it's time to deal with the attitude. You must point out the performance problem, identifying in clear, specific terms the behaviors that must change, and the impact that existing behaviors are having in the organization. Be careful to avoid generalities and comments about "personality." Ask how the employee sees it, and suggest or jointly work out a solution to the problem. Set a deadline for the change, monitor and follow up. Be sure to follow your corporate policies regarding discipline, documentation (and termination if it becomes necessary.) Remember, you probably have hired a lot of reasonably bright people. They know what's going on. Set the bar high—don't' drop it to accommodate the lowest common denominator when it comes to performance issues.

Look in the Mirror

Just in case you are thinking of counseling out a bunch of your people about now, think about this: If you find a pattern in your people where few seem to do what is expected, and you have a lot of low performers, it's time to take a good, hard look in the mirror and ask yourself if you are the

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problem. "Heresy!" you may say, but it's up to the manager to self-monitor and determine how he or she can be a more effective leader. More than once, I've been called in to "fix those people," but it was the boss that really needed fixing. If you are secure enough to run a confidential employee survey, heed the messages you receive. Take them to heart and become a true exemplar that everyone, from high potentials to low performers can watch to see how they should behave.

THE CHALLENGE FOR MANAGERS

Be clear about where your people really are on the performance pyramid. Look at the big picture for each person. Remember what Andrew Carnegie said: "You cannot push anyone up a ladder unless he is willing to climb it." Don't waste too much time on poor performers—define your expectations and then act. And don't, whatever you do, penalize your high impact people by shifting the work of low performers to them because you are not doing your job as a manager. Rather, spend plenty of quality time with your high impact folks—they represent the future potential of your organization. Invest in them. Lead by example. Show them what great performance looks like.

Dominic Cingoranelli, CPA, CMC assists contractors with growth, strategy and performance issues.

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