

Why do good people underperform as employees?

Every manager has been in this situation. After you conducted a long search, an extensive series of interviews, you found an individual who appears to have all the right credentials. She said all the right things and presented herself really well and so you hired her. Three months later you are questioning your decision. Things are not getting done the way you expect and there is something about her approach and behavior that is causing the rest of your team to be upset. You realize there is a mismatch that has to be addressed. Do I really have to do this all over again? What went wrong? I don't want to repeat another hiring mistake again.

What are the root causes why employees don't get the job done? It is usually one or a combination of these 4 deficits.

1. **Skill deficit** – *They don't know how to do the job.*

- a. *Do they have the skills to do the job?* Skills training takes time and money, but if someone needs special technical capabilities, it is critical that you quickly address the situation. They may not know how to take the knowledge and experience they have from previous positions and add the skills they need to do the new job properly.
- b. *Did you set the performance expectations and standards?* There needs to be clearly defined criteria that delineates what success looks like. "How do I know it when I see it?" This comes from measurable indicators of performance so that the person can make their own adjustments as they progress. Do they know what you really expect of them or have you assumed they can pick it up on their own? When accountabilities are unclear, balls get dropped, turf wars rage, confusion reigns, and productivity plummets.
- c. *Did you talk to the employee to be sure your communication was clear?* It is important that you meet to review their progress regularly so you know what is happening on the ground. Daily for the first week. Once a week for the rest of the first month. Once a month for the next 6 months. At least once a quarter after that. You shouldn't be a micro-manager, but you must keep everyone on the right track and making course corrections as soon as they are necessary.

2. **Resource Deficit** – *Can anyone really do the job?*

- a. *Does the pace make people bone-weary?* Is there just too much work coming their way too fast? Goals and standards should provide a little stretch to be sure that people are challenged. The "art" of management is knowing when the stretch becomes an insurmountable chasm that discourages people from trying.
- b. *Is the employee managing their time, resources and priorities effectively?* What additional resources or training can you give the employee to handle the volume of work? The resources you should consider adding might be people, time to do the job, money, equipment, technology, and other logistical support. The systems don't have to be the most up-to-date, but if they keep crashing then even the best performer gets

frustrated and unproductive.

3. Motivational Deficit – *They don't seem to want to do the job.*

- a. *Does the job utilize their skills, values, and interest?* Most people fall into the trap of choosing a profession or job that is a bad fit. Rather than trying to understand ourselves so we choose the right calling that aligns with our strengths and interests, we choose a job because of peer pressure or the first thing that comes along. The net result is that most people are in a job they like. Their motivations deteriorate and fall into a pattern of acceptance because they don't know what to do next.
- b. Know the demands of the job. Know the type of person that will be successful on that job. Hire people who have the behavioral traits that fit that job. That is why the right behavioral assessments are important to use in the hiring process.

4. Behavioral Deficit – *They seem to be a "fish out of water."*

- a. *Managers will often hire people for their skills, and then fire them for the behaviors they actually exhibit on the job.* This is not a negative judgment about the person, but rather the result of a poor behavioral fit between the individual and the job behaviors required.
- b. *Is there a lot of conflict and stress among the people with whom they deal?* An employee's insensitive or aloof attitudes toward co-workers can damage team environments and lead to employment discrimination lawsuits. Managers should take immediate action with any hostility. Conflict between interdependent groups can prevail because business objectives, deadlines and priorities are unclear.
- c. *Do the behaviors required to do the job, match with the person's core behavioral traits?* The classic disaster occurs if the strongly independent salesman is promoted to a sales manager that requires patience and strong team building skills. Different behaviors and skills sets may be required for these different jobs.
- d. *Do the person's behavioral traits fit with the company's culture?* While the person presented themselves well on paper, the employee's compatibility with the organization's value and mode of operation can be inconsistent with your expectations. This is not inconsequential and can lead to devastating results.
- e. *Do the behaviors required to do the job, fit with the manager's style and approach?* Every employee / manager relationship is unique and requires a different management approach. A decisive boss and a decisive direct report will be handled differently than a decisive boss with an indecisive employee. One size does not fit all situations. Both the manager and the employee needs to learn how to adapt to each other's' style.

- f. *Have you coached the person in the behaviors that are necessary to perform well on the job? Have you given them training or mentoring to help them cope and handle the issues they face? One on one counseling can be critical to integrating the new employee into the organization and the job. You must set the proper expectations and priorities on each area in order to get the proper performance from each person --- up to their full capabilities.*

Good people who are smart and have the experience, don't always do the job well. Look beyond the obvious symptoms and examine some of the root causes of the problem. Sometimes the fault is with the person, but sometimes it is simply because you put the good person in the wrong spot in your organization.

We can affect the culture and success of our organization 3 times in the life cycle of an employee. (1) When you hire them; (2) when they are on the team, and you can train and develop them; and (3) when you let them go. Have a focused plan in all three instances. Don't "wing" it and hope it all works out. Hope is not a strategy.

Doug Duncan

President, TalentValue Intl

support@talentvalue.com

888-733-7315

TalentValue puts your organization and people into focus.