

MID-IOWA BUSINESS

Selecting the right supervisors for your business

Hiring the right people is among the biggest challenges facing any organization. The quality of an organization cannot exceed the quality of its people. Finding capable people whose personal values are aligned with those of the business is critical.

There's at least one activity, however, that is even more vital to success than choosing the right employees: selecting the right supervisors.

Research by Frederick Herzberg during the 1980s determined that job dissatisfaction is not merely the absence of job satisfaction. This is similar to personal relationships whereby hate is not the absence of love, apathy is.

Herzberg found job factors contrib-



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uting to job satisfaction are therefore quite different than those leading to job dissatisfaction. For example, great working conditions (a beautiful, environmentally controlled office or factory) don't greatly influence satisfaction. Poor working conditions, however, such as a dirty, noisy or uncomfortable workplace drive dissatisfaction. Likewise, while personal responsibility is a major contributor to job satisfaction, lack of responsibility is not a main driver of worker dissatisfaction.

Herzberg's study showed a bad supervisor and a poor relationship with a supervisor where the second and third largest factors driving dissatisfaction. Only poor company policies and administration ranked higher. So choosing the wrong supervisor can undo all that hard work spent hiring the right people. They'll be poorly influenced by their supervisor and may become so disenchanting that they'll leave.

The ideal supervisor candidate possesses both strong process skills and people skills. That is, they must be recognized both for what they know as well as how they work with others. That's because leading organizations recognize the supervisor's primary role is to develop people who can solve problems and improve their portion of the business. This results in utilizing the collective brain power of all employees rather than a small subset designated as management.

Supervisor candidates must be capable teachers. They should be skilled in the work performed, but even more so as a problem-solver. Like all great teachers, great supervisors possess the seemingly contradictory traits of confidence within their subject matter and the humility to admit there's always more to learn, often from the people they're teaching. Finally, strong teachers possess the perception and patience to allow others to meaningfully learn with the methods and at the pace that works best for them.

Strong supervisor candidates must also demonstrate courage and be willing to risk episodes of interpersonal discomfort when fairness to the group dictates the need for coaching a wayward employee. They won't hide behind company policies, and they understand that fair is not the same as equal.

Personal time demands increase dramatically as one assumes responsibility for a group of people. So does the number of activities to be monitored. Choosing individuals who have demonstrated they are inherently organized and masters of their own time is critical.

Finally, the right individual possesses a clear understanding of the business and an appreciation for how their area of responsibility fits into the big picture. They understand the importance of teamwork and realize the No. 1 team is the overall organization rather than their specific area of responsibility.

Odds are slim you'll be lucky enough to identify an individual who currently meets all of the needs. If not, distinguish between "must" requirements that are values-driven (e.g., other-centered, courageous) and the "want" requirements that can be learned (e.g., subject matter experience, problem-solving skills). Don't compromise on the "musts."

If all else is equal, by all means promote from within and treat experience as an asset. This sends a strong message to all employees that they are valued.

Never select a current employee who isn't highly respected among their peers, no matter how experienced. This likewise sends a strong message, but not the one intended. It's much better to hire a person from outside the organization who possesses the skills noted above. The right person will quickly overcome the initial cynicism by demonstrating the needed qualities.

Rick Brimeyer is president of Brimeyer LLC, an independent management consulting firm located in Ames that guides organizations to higher performance by focusing on process improvement and leadership development.

Further information is available at www.brimeyerllc.com or by calling (515) 450-8855.

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Hy-Vee wellness programs are designed to educate and motivate your employees, students or other members of your organization to make positive lifestyle changes.



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