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*Training People, Inspiring Growth*

## Diagnosing a Non-Performer and Giving the Right Prescription

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If you have been a manager or supervisor for even a short time, I'm confident you have encountered a non-performer. Perhaps it is an employee who is not meeting expectations.

Oftentimes, it is someone who you know is capable of performing at a higher level and is just not making the effort. Maybe it is a consistency issue — you can count on them in the middle of the week, however Mondays and Fridays are questionable.

Of course, your next challenge is to diagnose the cause and help the employee develop an action plan for improvement. Just as in health care, an accurate diagnosis pays huge dividends in a rapid and sustained recovery.

Author Bruce Tulgan, in his best-selling book, "It's Okay to be the Boss," suggests there are four reasons why you need to address non-performance within your ranks. One — non-performers get paid. Two — they create problems, issues and rework that high performers have to fix. High performers really dislike working with non-performers and will most likely leave if they believe their manager is not addressing the obvious. Finally, avoiding the inevitable sends the message that "low performance is acceptable." Remember — you get what you tolerate and enable as managers.

So, how do you diagnose non-performance issues? Similar to a lean process improvement tool called the "Five Whys," you need to think about several factors that may be the root cause of under-performance. Ask, "Why is my employee not consistently performing at an acceptable level in her role?"

There are three factors typically at the center of most non-performance issues. Gino Wickman, author of "Traction — How to Get a Grip on Your Business," refers to it as GWC. Do they Get it, Want it and have the Capacity to achieve it? Tulgan refers to them as ability, skill and will. Years ago, at a Ken Blanchard seminar on situational leadership, I remember it being described as AWAK: are they able to do it, do they want to do it, are they being allowed to do it and do they know why it is important?

The first factor involves ability and clear expectations. In Gallup's 12 questions of a strong workplace, the first question

is, "Do I know what is expected of me at work?" As a manager, you need to be crystal clear about the what, why it matters, how it fits into the big picture and desired results or outcomes. You can allow more freedom with respect to how the task gets accomplished. This engagement factor also speaks to the importance of finding the right fit — having the core talents necessary to achieve excellence in a role.

We all know that a great engineer will not necessarily be a great engineering manager. The roles require different talents and skills. Gallup's third question is, "Do I have an opportunity at work to do what I do best every day?" Naturally, employees are more productive, engaged and perform at a higher level when they are in roles that align with their natural talents and abilities.

One thing you can do as a manager is engage in strengths based on conversations with your employees. Some important questions to ask include, "Tell me about the best recognition you have ever received — what made it so special?" "Describe activities where you feel tremendous satisfaction, where time flies by and where you can hardly wait for the opportunity to do it all over again."

If it is a skill issue, provide more training and/or mentoring for the employee. A common mistake made by managers is providing learning opportunities that do not align with how employees learn best. Take the opportunity to assess your employee's learning style. Training and education that focuses on application and provides realistic opportunities to practice the skills have proven most effective for sustained retention and positive performance results.

The second factor that may be linked to non-performance is will or the "want to do it." This is where you believe your employee is competent, skilled and knowledgeable. He has the talents to be exceptional in the role and for some reason, is just choosing not to do it well. Internal drive and motivation is within the employee's control.

Gallup's strong questions here include, "Does someone at work seem to care about me as a person?" "Have I received recognition or praise in the last seven days?" "Do I feel like I have a voice at work?" "Does the mission or purpose of my company make me feel my work is important?" At the core of this factor is that employees believe their work is valued, important and makes a difference. Of course, doing what you love helps. It is also important that an individual's personal values align with organizational values.

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As a manager, ask your employee, “*What would it take for you to do what I already know you can do well?*” “*What is important to you in a work setting?*” “*What makes you feel valued at work?*”

Work relationships are also at play here. When you enjoy your colleagues and feel like you work well together as a team, the camaraderie causes you to want to be at your best. You don’t want to let the team down. The pursuit of a shared, meaningful goal brings out the best in most.

The final factor is the capacity to do it. Are employees being allowed to be successful in their roles? Gallup’s strong question here is, “*At work, do I have the tools and resources to do my work right?*” It is important that employees have clear priorities and the equipment to produce high quality work in a productive manner.

Be clear with your employees about the work and what is required to be successful. For example, some jobs require weekend work or extensive travel. Some people do not have the capacity to be successful in such a role — even if the desire is there.

Ferdinand Fournies wrote a book, “*Why Employees Don’t Do What They are Supposed to Do and What to Do About It?*” It’s a great look into the many factors that can negatively impact employee performance. At the root is the employee’s ability and motivation, coupled with their capacity to get the work done. As a manager, asking the right questions and focusing on the proper factor can turn a non-performer into a valued contributor.