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Knowing the Roles and Placing People in the Best Positions

Every effective athletic coach knows the different skills and abilities needed to play each position on the team. Imagine a football coach letting his player with no kicking ability be the field goal kicker for the team! He would never do that because kicking ability is necessary for a field goal kicker's success. Effective managers are like effective coaches in that they know the skills, abilities, and expertise required for each and every role. Five things are needed to be able to do this:

A language that accurately describes the skills and abilities of people

Being able to describe a person as being an extrovert or having a warm personality is not enough to be a good manager. Effective managers develop a vocabulary and an ability to use this vocabulary that provide precise ways of defining different skills and abilities. Such a list, called the Skills and Abilities List, is provided at the end of this lesson.

A clear definition of success for the different roles and what skills each requires

Every role requires that the person filling that role be good at a number of different skills. Effectiveness in selling requires at least five different skills and abilities including being persistent without being insistent and being able to handle rejection. Effectiveness in managing requires at least seven different skills and abilities including being comfortable succeeding through others' efforts and being principled without being dogmatic. Effective managers know the different skills and abilities required for each role.

Examples:

Most managers believe that empathy and compassion are essential for a person to be effective in customer service. Our studies indicate that a person must be able to read people but that compassion and empathy about the customers' feelings actually gets in the way of effective customer service and causes the person to burn out because he is influenced by the negative feelings of disappointed or angry customers.

A second example of a commonly held misconception concerns salespeople. Most people believe that if a person is talkative and pushy, he will be good in sales. Certainly, story telling is an important skill for sales people, but more critical is the ability to listen to the prospect, because people buy what they want to buy and a salesman's job is to hear from the prospect what he is willing to buy. So people who talk all of the time are often ineffective in sales because they talk without listening.

An ability to see or measure what a person is actually able to do

Everyone has biases that cloud their ability to evaluate other people. Effective managers develop a better-than-average ability to look past their own biases and see what a person is actually able to do and not do. They do not suffer from being overly optimistic or pessimistic, being so one-sided that they are blind to certain skills in others, or being so self-serving that they resist others receiving recognition.

Make sure that you do not get confused thinking that a person is able to do a certain task just because she says so in a meeting. What people agree to and what they actually accomplish are often two very

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different things. Therefore, be careful to assess what each of your direct reports can actually do and do not get confused by what they say they can do.

An ability to effectively manage people who do not fit the roles perfectly

Once a manager has mastered a precise language, an ability to define the success requirements for each role, and define what each person can do, he then has to work with imperfect people in roles that change. An effective manager is genuinely able to be effective with imperfect fits, with people who need special help, with people who do not meet their expectations, and who are in jobs that change weekly. Managers who stick to a strict system and expect people to precisely fit into that system are not effective.

An ability to see beyond one's own methods to let others succeed in their own way

Effective managers do not have to have everything done their own way. When they know how they would do a certain task, they do not impose their way on their direct reports, when these individuals have a different way to get the job done. Effective managers balance the need to get the job done with the need to have their people grow and develop. They do not let an insistence on their preferred ways stifle the creativity, initiative, and development of their direct reports.

Skills and Abilities Comparisons

Knowing what different roles and situations require and being able to clearly distinguish these differences is very important. Here are three examples of differences between two different jobs that are often viewed as being very similar.

A sales person versus a sales manager.

- How they are different: It is very common for a top sales person to be promoted to sales management. Research shows that sales people like to win and get recognition for their accomplishments while managers are most effective when they like to support and equip others to win and succeed. It is common for sales people to ignore corporate paperwork requirements and not be attentive to the big picture and how things fit into the whole while the sales managers must be attentive to corporate processes and procedures and always be weighing how today's choices fit into the company's long range plans.
- How they are similar: they both need to be able to read people, have good practical judgment, be dependable, have personal strength and courage, and like to do a good job.

A legal assistant for a tough litigator versus a legal assistant for a title company real estate lawyer.

- The key difference: The one working for the litigator must be able to work consistently under time pressures and in stress-filled situations, must be able to work long hours and days at different times in the year, and must not be too sensitive to how people feel.
- How they are similar: Both need to be excellent in all legal assistant skills.

An accountant versus a real estate financial analyst.

- How they are different: For a person to like to do accounting on a day in and day out basis, the desire to think about analytical, structured, absolute things (preserve order) must be higher than the desire to apply these to business. The financial analyst is exactly the opposite of that: needing to understand accounting and numbers while really preferring to apply these to business matters and not want to spend time doing things for the sake of putting these things in order.
- How they are similar: Both need to be good in math and accounting.

Categories and Terms

Use the following list as a resource for distinguishing the skills and abilities needed for success in the different roles within your department.

People Orientation

- Reads people – can sense how to be effective with different individuals
- Needs others to feel good
- Enjoys individual interaction
- Enjoys people in group settings
- Prefers to not deal with others' feelings and individual needs
- Likes to help others

Results Orientation

- Good practical judgment
- Likes to get things done using his hands
- Likes to solve thinking problems
- Likes to apply theories to real life problems
- Likes to think about things more than apply them to business issues
- Likes to put things where they belong – bring or preserve the order

Environment Needs

- Is comfortable with a routine
- Likes order, structure, and certainty
- Likes to plan and organize
- Needs variety and to use his creative thinking
- Needs to work in a top-level, winning company

Behavioral Characteristics

- Thinks out of the box
- Obeys the rules no matter what
- Able to do things exactly as instructed
- Able to do repetitive tasks consistently
- Thinks in terms of the team and belonging to the team
- Will be protective of company policies, standards, and mission

Individual Characteristics

- Is an individual and needs to express her individuality
- Able to handle rejection - thick skin
- Has a lot of courage
- Is passionate about her work
- Able to keep secrets
- Likes to be in the middle of things
- Flexible in midst of change and surprises
- Likes to be center of attention
- Team player – little self-glory
- Accurate at knowing what she is best suited to do
- Capable in a highly competitive environment
- Accurate ideas about her own strengths and weaknesses

Ambition Characteristics

- Committed to growing personally
- Likes to win
- Needs rewards to be directly tied to his work
- Driven to excel and improve
- Strong sense of accountability
- High achievement drive
- High degree of initiating

Your Thinking as a Manager of Individuals

You are very aware of practical aspects of business and people. This thinking ability drives you to look for what needs to be done and which different individuals are best suited to do the job. This practical focus provides you with a drive to see where people best fit and what different people need in terms of encouragement and support. Be careful that you do not submit to your impatience that things need to be done now, but rather to grow in your accuracy in deciding what is needed, who is best suited for that responsibility, and determining what is needed to get the job accomplished.

You have very clear analytical thinking, therefore you are able to clearly define and analyze the skills and abilities necessary for success for different job positions. This also means that you have the ability to be precise in terms of a language that describes different skills and abilities. Couple your logical thinking ability with a firm commitment to understand how things work and to improve both your vocabulary and your understanding of the different skills and abilities needed for the jobs under your management.

Watch Out For

Not only do you have strengths that apply to your knowing the different roles and placing people in the best positions, but you also have thinking orientations that you need to be aware of. Watch out for:

Your drive for results can be a problem when it comes to clearly defining the roles of your direct reports. This drive can cause you to shorten the process of defining and expressing with precision your expectations, the standards by which success will be measured, and what your direct reports can count on as their keys to success. Be sure to take the time necessary to think through, before you go into action, the expectations you have for each direct report. Express clearly the outcomes necessary for each person to succeed, and measure their success according to their results. Don't let your drive to get things moving forward and to get results cause you to not properly prepare your direct reports for their roles.

Your strong dedication to meeting your own goals perfectly can block your ability to effectively lead an imperfect, non-ambitious team. If some of your direct reports do not display your dedication or do not strive to excel or grow in ways that you do, you will have a tendency to not value the contributions and abilities of those individuals. You will want to be careful that you do not impose your self-expectations or self-understanding on others in such a way that those expectations blind you from seeing what your direct reports are actually capable or wanting to do. Master the ability to assess your direct reports' skills and abilities whether they are like or unlike your abilities and skills.

A second point of vulnerability comes from your strong sense of loyalty and commitment to your goals. You have a difficult time changing direction when you commit yourself to one direction. While this is a significant character trait in terms of loyalty, it can be a problem when having a say in what roles employees fulfill. You will tend to not view change as an option, and therefore you will not change a person from one role to another until it is so obvious that no alternative is in sight. When a direct report is not able to be effective in a certain role, make the change. Be careful that you do not become so dedicated to staying with your decision that you do not admit your mistake and make the changes that are better for the company, the team, and the individuals involved.

Suggestions

In your manager's notebook keep notes on each of the job positions that report to you. This can be your own job description book where you record the abilities and behaviors that are necessary for success in each role and the behaviors that lead to problems or failure. Use the Skills and Abilities List to help you define or choose those skills, abilities, and attitudes.

Just as good athletic coaches regularly assess their players and the positions they play, review your team in relation to their skills and abilities and the tasks they perform. Be careful that you are not so comfortable with change that you move people around too frequently or so resistant to change that you never move your people around.

Remember a key difference between people who are good and people who are excellent is in their abilities to be precise. Use this eLesson as a tool for you to improve your precision about understanding people and the roles they should be in to succeed.

Thank you,

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