



Cultivating Potential – One (Good) Employee at a Time

We understand that people drive results. Now there is proof that unleashing your team's potential can drive individual and organizational performance. Consider this study, demonstrating that highly engaged employees are:

- 480% more committed to helping their company succeed
- 370% more likely to recommend their company as an employer
- 250% more likely to recommend improvements

Temkin Group, Employee Engagement Benchmark Study, 2012

Yet, all too often business leaders and managers spend an inordinate amount of time addressing performance issues with “high maintenance, low producing” employees. These individuals can be toxic in their attitude and to your company's culture. However, we continue to spend time, money and energy trying to course correct someone who either isn't a good fit for the role / organization, or unwilling to embrace real change and growth. The consequence: the organization hobbles forward with an ailment that isn't properly addressed, thereby negatively impacting its overall health and capacity.

When you tolerate and coddle the difficult employees, you steal time away from people who, with your guidance, coaching and mentorship, could be star performers. It's easy to see why this happens. “Good employees” are often self starters with a strong work ethic; they boost morale and play well with others.

Unearthing the Diamond in the Rough

A caveat here: It's not my intent to have you label a difficult employee as high maintenance and therefore un-coachable. Sometimes, an employee is a bit of a “diamond in the rough;” someone that has hidden exceptional characteristics and/or future potential, but currently lacks the final touches that would make him/her truly stand out. Be honest with yourself here, it's not about having a charity project because you have a big heart. In the end, enabling or pitying someone does not demonstrate true respect nor does it aid in the individual or company's growth. If you find yourself in that situation, you can start by choosing to interact differently with someone who has a history of being challenging; thereby breaking the pattern and re-contracting with new expectations.



How to Motivate for Performance

Psychologists have been studying what motivates us for years. Cognitive theories, such as the Self Determination Theory, suggest humans are "*inherently proactive but only when the external environment supported this.*" To allow our innate motivation to flourish, the following must exist:

- **Autonomy** – the innate need to feel in command of one's life.
- **Competence** – being effective in one's job and achieving mastery.
- **Relatedness** – the desire to interact with others and have social connection.

So where can you start to cultivate the potential of a latent or under-developed star performer?

Know and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. It's actually much easier to cultivate one's strengths than it is to improve one's weaknesses. That doesn't mean you turn a blind eye to their challenge areas. It means sitting down with your key employee, one-on-one, for a candid conversation. By being forthright, you build trust and you get to the heart of the matter.

Demand excellence. And give them all the support possible to achieve it! Know when and where to increase their responsibilities, preferably incrementally to build confidence and competence.

Provide a motivational culture. Know your people – what they like to do, what they care about, their goals and their concerns. Understand and tap into what *intrinsically* motivates them. *See them for all that they are – and what they are capable of becoming.* Create an environment that is conducive to igniting passion, empowerment and innovation. That includes allowing for and encouraging making mistakes. No innovation can happen if employees fear retribution of calculated risk taking and doing things outside the norm.

Include them. Provide meaningful opportunities for your team to creatively contribute to process improvements in your organization. Create a cross departmental work team (with at least one senior manager), to collectively address a specific concern. This breaks down silo barriers, builds teams *and* tackles a plaguing company issue. (Be sure to empower them with the resources and ability to make changes!).

Reward right attitudes and right behaviors. Catch them in the act of showing up as a star performer and demonstrating the kind of thinking and actions that produce results. People are



motivated by achievement. Be a conduit for their success. Show genuine appreciation and provide positive, real time, reinforcement.

Coach versus instruct. Effective leadership requires approaching every situation and person with the skills and temperament needed in that moment. There are times when it is appropriate to simply tell someone what needs to be done. There are other times, when it will provide more long term value to coach your employee. Coaching raises their awareness so they can be more autonomous, better decision-makers and more accountable. Coaching requires an entirely different set of skills, such as making and sharing observations, asking open ended questions, seeking their recommendations and input and active listening.

Track and communicate tangible progress. Connect the organization's goals directly to the employee's work so they can see how their actions produce results. People like to contribute and be a part of something bigger. Progress begets more progress.

Have a plan. This may sounds rudimentary, but more often than not, good employees are left to their own devices. Instead, co-create a pathway for continued professional development – one that is aligned with the organization's direction, purpose and values. One that is clear about expectations while giving them autonomy, opportunities to build their competencies and develop strong team relationships.

Create a symbiotic situation where you can leverage what the employee is good at, what they love to do and what needs to get done. When you give your attention to an employee with potential, you set the tone that at your company, personal and professional growth is expected and performance is rewarded.



Karen Natzel serves as a business therapist to leaders who want to create healthy, vibrant and high performing organizations. Karen helps her clients navigate change and growth by serving as a confidential sounding board; as facilitator, trainer, conflict-resolver, relationship-builder, awareness-raiser, communicator, coach and strategist. Her passion is inspiring others to cultivate their potential and live authentically.

Contact: Karen@natzel.net | 503.806.4361 | www.biztherapy.biz