

Setting the Stage for Employee's Success

12/17/07

We have a couple of employees who aren't doing what we want them to do. One has been here awhile, one has recently taken on some new responsibilities. Ours is a busy service office, and we have a lot going on. People are expected to pitch in, and still get their own work done. Right now that's not happening for these two. Any suggestions?

The success of any business rests on it's ability to acquire and grow talent. From what I know about your business, there is nothing in what you have these employees doing, that requires specialize education. When you hired these employees you were pretty confident that they could do the job. That means it's a training and development issue. Let's focus there for today.

There are four stages to training and development. Correctly assessing which stage an individual is at, and knowing what to do to help the person in each stage are critical skills for any manager. Figuring out which stage an individual is in at any given moment requires that you correctly assess both skill and motivation.

Once you've figured out the stage, you need to modify your behavior as a manager in order to best help the person you're working with make progress. In stage one, you want to educate, stage two is about training, three is about coaching and four is

about delegating. Finally, remember that all of this is situational, meaning that an employee can be at stage four for one task, stage one for another and so on.

Let's start with stage one. This is the stage called don't know, don't care. Your employee has no idea why the task is important, and has little or no ability to perform the task. The key to success in this stage is to talk with the employee about why this task matters in their life. It could be anything from, "it will be fun", to, "you'll get to build valuable career skills", to "you get to keep your job". In stage one, focus on helping the employee find the right motivation to engage. Don't worry about building skill, yet.

In stage two, the employee now is engaged and needs to build skill. This is called the, "let me at them!" stage, where the employee is eager to engage, almost to the point of danger. The employee may say things like, "How hard can this be? It looks simple to me!" In stage two, the key is to focus on building basic skill. Practice routines over and over. Do not allow deviation. Work on doing it the correct way, over and over again. This stage is all about building muscle memory.

Now comes stage three, perhaps the most challenging stage. This is where the employee may have all the skill needed, but won't

engage. You see, as the employee builds skill and takes on more and bigger challenges, they also run into bigger and bigger breakdowns. At some point they get challenged to the point of saying, "I could get in real trouble by pursuing this. I can't do this. This will never work". Focus on coaching in this stage, since the employee actually has all the skill needed, just needs to build trust that using the skill more will result in better and better results over time. This is the coaching stage. Don't step in and do for the employee. Watch as the employee approaches the task at hand, and then discuss how it's going. Ask the employee to find their own solutions, and support them when they struggle.

Finally comes stage four – independence. In stage four, the employee is able to show up, do the task correctly over and over again without any prompting or reminders. Step out of the employee's way, delegate, and ask for a report on results.

A few final reminders. All of these stages are situational. And breakdowns can force an employee to slide backwards. Always start by assessing which stage the employee is in before taking action. Remember that if the employee is struggling to build skill, stage 2, you need to assess whether they can build skill, or whether this task is just not a good fit.



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There is also something called the Peter Principle, which supposes that employees are promoted to their level of incompetence. Just because someone was good at A, does not mean they'll master B. Be careful not to promote someone just because they are asking for more money or responsibility. And, once you've promoted, don't be afraid to change things around if you think they're not making enough progress. It may be that another employee in the organization is better suited to do what you've assigned.

Looking for a good book? Try *The Peter Principle*, by Laurence Peter and Raymond Hull. It's a classic.

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