DRAKE Business Review

HELPING YOU MEET THE CHALLENGES IN YOUR BUSINESS – RIGHT NOW VOL.7, NO.1

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THE BOARD'S ROLE IN TALENT MANAGEMENT

WHAT DO GREAT CEOS DO?

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Take Control of Your Poor Performers and Strengthen Your Team

Different companies in different industries face diverse and unique challenges. However, they all face one issue — poor-performing employees and having to manage them. In a weak economy, the situation becomes even more difficult. The easy answer to dealing with bad performers is to treat them the same way you would in a great economy. But, like most things in life, knowing the answer is not nearly as difficult as acting on it. If it were, companies wouldn't have poor performers. In fact, dealing with these bad performers is one of the greatest struggles of most leaders, and making the right decisions becomes more vital to the organization's success.

The good news is: Just as good leaders become great leaders during poor times, the bad performers can become good performers.

Identifying bad performers

"Any Company" has an employee his manager describes as not great; but because he is a long-term employee who knows what to do, he keeps his job. The employee doesn't have a bad attitude, but he doesn't have a good one either. The manager says he is a good person, but that he tends to be grumpy or unhappy on occasion. He does just enough to get by, or does what he is asked to do but nothing above and beyond his duties. Everybody knows it, including the leader. This employee is a bad performer, an employee whom you would not recommend or want to duplicate. When evaluating a bad employee such as this one, a leader can ask: "Would I hire this employee again, knowing what I know now?" If the answer is no, this employee is a bad performer.

The need to address bad performers

Having identified a bad employee, the leader must address the situation for three main reasons.

First, not addressing the situation tells the entire organization that bad performance is acceptable. The supply and demand theory of goods applies to people

as well: The supply of motivated and talented people is higher in a poor economy than in any other economy. A great leader should use this opportunity to assess the organization's current talent pool, as well as the individual performance of each employee, to take advantage of the great supply of talent. In theory, there should never be a bad-performing employee during a poor economy. Every employee should understand the company needs everyone's contribution more than ever, and if that doesn't work, every employee should know there are thousands of motivated people looking for the right opportunity. This statement is not made to be a threat, because a person working under fear is a sure to performance poorly. Think of it more as a promise that they will be held accountable.

Second, a leader's job is to ensure the success of the team and maximize its performance. A leader cannot do this without addressing and resolving bad performance. Leaders who tolerate bad performance of others hurt their own. Their commitment is to the team, and no player is more important than the team.

> *"A leader cannot maximize the success of the team without addressing and resolving bad performance."*

Third, a leader's job is to motivate and challenge the entire team to make a difference. If their company is facing tough times, success is determined by the commitment of each individual and the accountability of all. A weak economy is a great excuse to be either successful or unsuccessful. Most people blame outside influences, such as the economy, for lack of sales, money, and professional and personal success. Of course, they don't blame those same outside influences when they achieve success. Great leaders don't blame the economy for their successes or failures; they use a poor economy to motivate their team and maximize their results. A leader's most important job is to motivate and develop their employees in any, and all, conditions.

How to address bad performers

Having identified the bad performers and knowing how to address the situation, a leader must define bad performance and great performance, and show the team what they both look and feel like. The team must understand the great challenges that bad performance creates, and these must be removed. This will explain to each employee why bad performances will no longer be acceptable, so when the leader addresses it in the future, everyone will understand why. A leader needs to show the level of importance each team member plays in the success of the organization, and the opportunities a poor economy brings.

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What can you do? Set the expectations of each team member in writing and ask each employee to create a plan of action showing you how they will succeed. After you have made any necessary adjustments to each plan, put them into action. Review the plans on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, recognize the team members who achieve their tasks, and immediately address those employees who are not achieving their tasks. Hold these employees accountable. This is when most leaders fail — holding bad performers accountable is difficult yet imperative. As in everyday life, a small problem ignored only gets bigger.

Learn from those professional sports leagues that hold an annual draft to select new players. This challenges the current players to fight for, and earn, their positions. To effectively deal with bad performers in a poor economy is to treat every week like draft week; never stop looking for new talent, and continue to challenge current employees to reach new heights.

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Reprinted with the permission of Nathan Jamail, President of Jamail Development Group. Author of the bestselling book The Sales Leaders Playbook, *he is a motivational speaker, entrepreneur, and corporate coach. Nathan helps individuals and organizations achieve maximum success. www.nathanjamail.com*