

# TACTICS



By Ira Wolfe

**H**arry has been working in the same company for nearly 20 years. He knows the company and his job inside and out. He is loyal and hard working. But now he seems to be working harder and harder. His productivity is up but it is taking more and more time to do what he needs to do. Harry is overwhelmed.

You will also recognize Sarah. Sarah is the nagging employee who always wants something more from you. You wouldn't dare ask Sarah "How are you today?" because on the best of days you might get a "not bad." But more than likely you would hear all about her broken car,

# OOOPS!

Motivational Mistakes Managers Make.

lazy good-for-nothin' husband, the lousy weather, or her rotten kids.

In walks Larry. Clean-cut, enthusiastic, outgoing, and wearing a big smile. You think to yourself, "This is too good to be true, even though Larry is the interviewee and you are the interviewer, he is the calming one in your office. Larry just gives the brilliant appearance of actually knowing what is going on and has the most incredible positive attitude. What a welcome change to the torrent of unmotivated sloughs who have responded to your pleas for help over the past few years. Unfortunately, you even offered several of them jobs out of desperation.

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While there may be too few skilled candidates around, there are plenty of good workers who, given a reasonable learning curve and some guidance, could do an excellent job — if only the managers who need to hire them could identify the right person and train them.

Unfortunately, many managers have been allowed to drive hiring and training initiatives without the foggiest idea about what to do. To their credit, who is trained to deal with this unprecedented shortage of unskilled and skilled workers? But companies blow it when they turn a blind eye to this dilemma and allow marginal managers to staff and manage the Harrys and Sarahs of the world and when the manager himself doesn't really understand how to meet the challenge.

What are some of the biggest Motivational Mistakes Managers Make?

- Hiring on experience and expecting talent. Many managers mistake experience for an ability to do the job. Experience merely indicates that an individual had done something similar in the past. Skills determine if an individual has the aptitude to do something. Talent, however, reveals if the individual has the attitude and motivation to do something — how well and how often an individual will do a job in the future and do it consistently. If you learn a skill or have experience it will help you get a little better, but it will not cover up for a lack of talent. Skills without talent will lead to acceptable but not great performance, or moments of great performance in a sea of mistakes and absence.

- Spend more money on training unqualified people rather than hiring right in the first place.

We recently completed two cost-to-hire-a-new-employee studies — one for a hospital, the other for the career development center. In total we identified the cost to hire and train new employees in four categories.

The costs to hire, which included everything from the cost of advertising and recruitment to the administrative time to schedule interviews, ranged from

a low of \$87.00 per new hire (and included almost no advertising dollars) to a high of \$300.

In high turnover positions, the cost of mis-hires dropped right to the bottom line and shaved profits quickly. Although the cost to hire before training was significant, it was not as relevant as the amount of time and resources invested by key managers and trainers in training unqualified candidates or candidates who terminated before little or any productivity. During the first quarter of 2001, one client for one position spent nearly \$40,000 on training new hires who left during or shortly after training. The return on investment — 0%. The projected annualized loss — \$200,000.

In both studies, the cost to train an employee increased the cost to hire an employee between 300% and 1000%. For two of the four positions, the training period was one week or less with a maximum 80 percent or better productivity expected within three weeks on the job. For one of the two professional positions, eight to twelve weeks of training were required and the costs were staggering — up to \$45,000 for one employee.

In desperation to fill critical open positions, several managers resorted to hiring contracted labor. The cost to hire and train a contract employee was 20% to 300% more than hiring a permanent employee and in many cases, actually increased the rate of turnover.

- Train skills and expect excellence. Over \$1 billion dollars a year is spent on job skills training for employees like Sarah and Harry. The training is excellent. The results just aren't always sustainable in most cases. Until recently, however, this was the best option available.

Training nearly always gets people to change behavior. But how long does this change stick? For a very few, the change can be permanent. For the vast majority of people, the motivation and enthusiasm for change evaporates as soon

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as the new behavior collides with the present. This could be the instant the pager or mobile phone rings, the moment you re-enter your office to find another employee resigned, or arriving home to find an expected bill. Whatever the exact time period, new studies show that traditional training does not impact long-term changes.

Training that sticks not only requires understanding what must change and how to make the changes, but understanding what an individual is not doing that brings success and what he or she is doing that interferes with success. Training skills without talent is merely damage control, not development.

• Avoid karaoke hiring. Karaoke literally means "empty orchestra." Don't confuse activity with the ability to get results. Reading the lyrics to a popular song with the support of a professional studio production in the background does not indicate an individual has the talent to quit his or her day job and plan their acceptance speech at next year's Grammy Awards. A good manager knows how to shut off the music and see how this rising star sings a cappella.

Is Larry more motivated than Sarah? The expected answer is yes, yet based on new breakthrough research in the study of human motivation, Sarah may in fact be just as motivated and just as effective as Larry is. Unfortunately her quality of motivation is negative and irritating, and what she is most effective at doing may not help the business. Sarah is motivated to prove the world is out to get her, and she is very effective at proving her point. Larry, on the other hand, is positive and engaging. Larry is motivated to make the best of every day, and he is very effective at making people feel good around him. The problem is that Sarah may be more skilled at creating a negative world than Larry is at doing his job, unless of course you are paying him to make other people feel good.

Just for the record, motivation doesn't mean an individual can do the job. The motivation you see is what we call motivational sources, or the intensity an individual draws on to live his life and how well this person feels about himself and the environment around him. Motivational skills, or what might be considered life skills, determine how skilled the individual is at actually creating this positive or negative feeling. Did Larry actually have the ability to go out and create his own pleasure and solve his own problems or is he living in la-la land? Could it be possible that Sarah is herself okay despite making everyone miserable around her?

Unfortunately, people like Larry with positive attitudes tend to shy away

from negatively motivated people. Assuming Larry has the skills along with a positive attitude, attracting talent like Larry, who is effective and efficient, is difficult when the work environment is infected with Sarahs.

Our Quality of Motivation research shows that when positive people are surrounded by people whose attitudes are more negative, one of four things may happen:

1. The more positive person can attempt to change the situation.
2. The more positive person is changed and becomes negative just like the rest of them.
3. The more positive person learns to cope with the situation.
4. The more positive person leaves the situation.

Strange but true, negative people tend not to leave the very situation they complain about the most. They gain comfort from their complaining and generally find other "complainers" who comfort them. This sets up an into lerable and paradoxical situation.

The negative people stay, giving the impression of improving your retention rate but in effect drive away the positive and more than likely productive employee. In order not to lose "one more employee," the negative employee is encouraged to stay with bonuses, promotions and incentives and is therefore "rewarded" for their negative attitude.

Today's managers face more challenges at a faster rate of change than ever before in our history. Regardless how quickly they react, the change outside the business happens even faster. The wise manager has three options for dealing with a changing and shrinking workforce.

1. Tell himself little lies to avoid having to deal with reality.
2. Wait and see what happens
3. Act now. Recognize you cannot change the wind, but you can adjust the sails.

Motivating employees is no longer based on hocus-pocus, rah-rah training, or dangling carrots. The successful manager will capitalize on the new capability to identify, hire and develop talented people.

*Ira S. Wolfe is president and founder of Success Performance Solutions. He will be presenting "Motivational Mistake Managers Make" at the Lancaster Business T.E.A.M Expo on May 10, 2001 at 7:30 AM. Admission is free.*

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