

Too Many Employees Who Don't "Get It"? **...maybe the problem isn't *them*!**

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As professional business coaches, we find that almost every challenge identified by a business owner falls in one (or more) of three categories: Time, Team or Money. And one of the most frequent Team issues is the business owner's frustration over employees who don't share his/her passion, vision, understanding and commitment when it comes to the practical, everyday actions required to run the business and satisfy its customers. We often hear about employees who don't seek the creative solution, who are unwilling to put in the extra time or effort, who lack a sense of urgency, who...well, don't "get it".

Why is this? Is it simply a deterioration of the work ethic? Has a spirit of entitlement taken over? Should business owners simply accept this as a reality and work harder to fill in the gaps themselves? Probably not. Not, at least, until he/she has gone through the following checklist to ferret out some root causes underlying the behaviors in question:

1. Are we hiring the right people?

In his renowned literary work, "1984", George Orwell speaks of an advanced society in which the number of janitors, scientists, educators, health care workers, secretaries, laborers, etc, needed for each successive generation can be calculated with the aid of sophisticated computer algorithms. Having this information, the governing bodies then proceed to genetically program next-generation of babies to match these requirements, both in numbers and in intellect. In this way, there is neither an excess nor a shortfall of capable resources to fill all position requirements.... *AND*..... because each person was specifically "engineered" for the position they will ultimately fill, they are sublimely happy doing their job, with no thoughts, aspirations, frustrations or jealousies about doing something else with their lives.. By some definitions, the "perfect" workforce.

Of course, we live in a very different world than Orwell described. Nonetheless, we can take a lesson from his extreme example and ask whether we have the right systems in place to attract and select the most appropriate members for our team. Do we really understand the *skill sets* necessary to build success into the position? How have we measured and determined the extent to which our applicants (or incumbents) meet these requirements? Most importantly, have we conducted a DISC (or similar) personality profile to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of our applicants *attributes* against the position requirements? For example, the outgoing, affable, people-oriented characteristics we generally like to see in salespeople usually won't be the types of skills that make a good accountant. The dynamic, hard-charging demeanor of a CEO-type is generally pretty incompatible with the profile of a successful receptionist. So, you see, it's not enough to simply attract talented people into your organization. Both their skill sets and personality must fit the recipe for success in the position. We at ACEPA call this "job matching". It is one essential ingredient in selecting and retaining the top performers key to your team.

2. Are We Communicating a Clear, Compelling Message Around Our Vision And Our Culture?

One of the most frequent frustrations we hear as coaches from business owners concerns actions taken (or not taken) by their employees are completely different from what the owner him/her self would have done.

This is a real “red flag” to us. It is symptomatic of a serious disconnect between the owner’s philosophy and the understanding the employee may have of this philosophy. Realistically, the overwhelming majority of workers want to do a good job. But when they don’t clearly understand expectation levels and values in the company, they will - at best - do what they *think* they should and - at worst - do nothing.

Some 2000 years ago, a Chinese general named Sun Tzu wrote a book entitled “The Art of War” as a handbook for his emperor on how to raise and maintain an army. Early in the work, he asserts to his emperor that an army can be constructed from virtually “any assemblage of persons”. When challenged by the emperor to demonstrate this, Sun Tzu assembles the palace concubines and proceeds to organize them, complete with swords, battle axes and drums into an army. He does this with discipline, communication, solicitation of feedback and repetitive drills, until each concubine fully and completely understands what is expected and how performance is measured. He then turns to his emperor and says, “Your soldiers, sire, are now properly drilled and disciplined and ready for Your Majesty’s inspection. They can be put to any use that their sovereign may desire. Bid them go through fire and water and they will not now disobey”.

Articulate your vision and expectations for your company over and over again. Give positive feedback for actions and behaviors which conform and gentle feedback for those that don’t. This is what we at ACEPA call the “farming” part of the business. It requires patience and discipline. It takes time. But, having taken root, it will multiply and create the culture you seek and need.

Next time, in Part 2, we’ll discuss the two other essential elements in building your high-performance team:

- 3. Do Your Team Members Understand How Performance Is Measured?**
- 4. Is Performance Rewarded Often? And Visibly?**

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