

The Unfair Advantage: The Right Talent Fit The Most Significant Business Challenge Over the Next 20 Years

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The most significant business challenge over the next 20 years will be recruiting, retaining, and inspiring talent. (McKinsey and Company study of 77 companies and 6,600 managers – 1998)

I see them every week: talented people in the wrong jobs or in the wrong circumstances. There is the highly compensated young executive, Sam, who is on the hunt for a position in another company. He has lost his drive for his current position – why? Because he is not feeling valued by the company. It isn't a matter of money; it is a matter of pride and what motivates Sam. His CEO could save hundreds of thousands in turnover cost simply by appointing Sam to a prestigious committee or giving him some well-deserved acknowledgment...if only he knew.

There is Nancy who has been feeling ill for 3 months. She was a trusted, loyal, reliable receptionist. About 4 months ago, she was "promoted" to a job that gave her a raise in pay and required her to call customers who were delinquent in their payments. She is doing the job. And every night she goes home with a queasy stomach, feeling tired and with no energy to play with her live-in granddaughter. She really would like her old job back but is afraid to mention it and be seen as unappreciative and a failure. Instead, she is looking at other job opportunities.

This is an example of having a good person in the wrong position. It is important to correct that mistake quickly before the person is demoralized, quits, or is hired away to another company. Look inside the organization for a job that is a better fit. There are sound assessments that will help you do that.

A recipe for failure is to have good people in the wrong circumstances. And these failures are costly: Turnover costs range from a minimum of 1.5 to 9 times a person's compensation. What business can afford to make these mistakes?

The evolution of the industrial and service economies to the knowledge economy has posed a significant challenge for today's leader/managers. They have to transition from the job of managing physical assets to job of managing human assets; this is a challenge particularly for those who were successful in the old service economy paradigm. Having the data and system to know exactly what a job requires, match people to that profile, and create a high leverage development direction gives you coveted, unfair advantage of having the right people in the right jobs and every job right for the organization.

Recently, I published a book, *ENGAGE! Roadmap for Workforce-Driven Change in a Warp-Speed World*. This book documented an award-winning organizational change process. Included in the major assumptions and conclusions was: The most critical alignment allocation is getting the right people in the right jobs. How do you do that? How do you hire, train and retain good talent? How to you re-allocate your staff when you have a talented person in the wrong job?

The first step is to make sure every job is right for the organization. Is it still relevant? Does the job support a key organizational process or system? Can it be combined with other jobs? Are the job expectations reasonable, clear and aligned to the key organizational goals? For example, one organization had a customer support person, Brenda, handling issues related to a product with dramatically reduced sales. Another part of customer support was now handling inquiries and requests via on-line chat. But no one made the connection that Brenda was underutilized and largely irrelevant for over a year. She was afraid to bring this to anyone's attention for fear of losing her job.

Benchmarking a job is a way to make sure all your jobs are right for your organization. The benchmarking process addresses how the job helps the organization achieve its goals, and identifies key accountabilities and the skills, knowledge and attributes required. A good benchmarking process will also identify the preferred behaviors and job motivators that are required. With this information, decision makers can match a person's preferred behaviors, drivers, and attributes up against that ideal job profile and make hiring or placement decisions with the confidence that they are saving themselves the hassle and cost of turnover and poor performance.

To ensure retention and performance, once you have the right person in the right job, the next step is to establish a performance development system. The same information used to make a good hiring decision, i.e., the match of the individual to the job, is the information to use in creating a performance development plan. Ask your newly placed individual to select a high impact objective that will move him or her closer to the ideal profile for that job.

Establish a performance appraisal schedule and keep it. It takes little time to check in with your newly placed person to see how he or she is doing on the goal(s). That investment in time will go a long way toward establishing the kind of trust that converts to productivity. Too many managers let those performance appraisals slip, leaving the individual to question how important his or her progress is.

In summary, it is important to have clearly defined jobs, carefully match a person's knowledge, skills, and attributes to that definition, then create a program that supports his or her continued development to be a success at the job. The time invested in this process will pay off many times in saved turnover cost and increased productivity.

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