

By Dr Victor S.L. Tan

In a recent training programme, I explored with the group of participants on the common underlying reasons why employees fail to perform. Many have the knowledge, skills and experience but few perform up to expectations.



NOT PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY

One of the most common causes is that people are not given the opportunity to put to practice what they know. Some leaders are insecure and they feel threatened by the abilities of their subordinates. Others simply have poor delegation skills and hog the key tasks. Of course, there are leaders who fail to realise the talents of people. And then there are leaders who cannot trust their people to do the work right. It is no surprise that with such leaders, there are many employees who perform below par.

NOT MOTIVATED TO APPLY WHAT THEY KNOW

Many leaders pride themselves that they have sent their staff for training to upgrade their skills. Organisations pay up to millions of dollars sending their top

executives overseas to attend conferences and seminars. However, few organisations really assess the degree to which these participants apply the knowledge gained in the workplace. There is a gap between knowing and actually doing it. It is like knowing all about proper nutrition and dieting to lose weight and actually putting to practice to shed the pounds. The gap is in the motivation and discipline to do it. When people are not motivated to apply what they know in the workplace, they underperform.

SUPERIORS OVERRIDE SUBORDINATES' BETTER IDEAS

It is sad to know that some organisations have great ideas but they implement the lesser ones. The reason is because many superiors override the better ideas of their subordinates. It does not make sense to hire someone with the experience and talent and not tap into his or her new ideas. Likewise, it is illogical when staff who are sent for training have their suggestions or new ideas vetoed by their bosses. Leaders who override the better ideas of people blocking the performance of their people and demoralising them in the process. The value of an organisation lies not in the great knowledge of the people but in the application of this knowledge to achieve better results.

PEOPLE ARE AFRAID TO APPLY WHAT THEY KNOW

There is another very significant reason why many competent people are not doing what they know. They are afraid to do things they know as there are risks involved. If an organisation does not encourage risk taking and punishes people for mistakes, people will be afraid to try new things. New competency in terms of new skills, ideas, talents and experience will never see the light of day in such an organisation. Bright and talented people will be cowed into following the status quo. Thus, new blood and great talents are recruited to an organisation, only to have them succumb to fear and thus continue to do things the same

old way as the organisation has done over the years.

NEW SKILLS NOT EXPLOITED FOR BETTER USE



Another reason why talented and skillful employees are not performing better is because they could not apply them in the workplace. A good example is a client who has sent a group of their managers to attend our training programme on "Developing Consulting Skills". Despite being equipped with the knowledge and skills, many have indicated that after one year, they have yet to be placed in any real consulting work. Their leaders have failed to capitalise on this new competency of this team. Their leaders could have this team undertake some of the consulting work internally or carve out consulting work that will help address some key areas of improvements in the organisation and have this team of "internal consultants" undertake the new task. By not exploiting this new competency, the leaders have put to waste the skillful consulting skills their people have.

SKILLS THAT ARE OF NO RELEVANCE

Of course, there are cases where companies train their people

in skills that are of no relevance and use to the company. In fact, there are companies who hire people with all kinds of specialties and skills which they have no use for as they are not in a business or industry that needs those skills. Of course, some may argue that some of these skills may be of use in the future. The wisdom here is in the time perspective. Some skills you need in the next five years will make no sense to acquire them now, as they would be obsolete when you need them. There lies the need to recruit the right people with the right set of skills at the right time. Likewise, sending staff for training in areas that are of no relevance will also be unproductive. In this case, training needs analysis is critical before developing a training plan for the organisation.

In essence, to get people to perform better, it is crucial for leaders to understand the common reasons why people are not performing or performing under par in the first place.



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**ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF
NON-PERFORMANCE**