

ENABLING PERFORMANCE IN THE WORKPLACE

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THERE is a serious problem in today's workplace. However, most leaders are at a loss as to how to handle it. How do you change non-performers? The irony is that many of these non-performers have the knowledge, skills and experience to perform well, and yet they do not. A skill-building programme is obviously not the answer here. Likewise, a quick fix motivation or a teambuilding programme will not be effective here. The problem lies deep within those individuals.

Before we can change this kind of non-performers, we should first understand them a little better.

Non-performers have some common traits:

- They make excuses for their poor performance;
- They blame others for what they do not accomplish;
- They wait for others to move things forward;
- They rationalise away the issues and continue their behaviour of non-performance; and
- They have deep hidden "emotional" issues that block them from performing.

Here are some proactive actions leaders can undertake to help these people unblock their performance.

Address the root cause

There are many reasons a person can come up with for his or her non-performance. However, the true reason often resides deep inside the person. A good leader delves deep into this reason to understand the underlying cause that prevents a person from performing. In one of my client



organisations, I observed that one very capable executive actually went to great lengths to explain his "reasons" for not being able to do the things he is supposed to do. For each act of non-performance, he has reasons for them, among which include poor communication of his superior, uncooperative colleagues, incompetent subordinates, demanding customers and ambiguous company policies. Yet, many of his colleagues are performing well, despite these same "challenges".

During a one-to-one coaching session and upon a deeper analysis, I found out that his non-performance is simply him not wanting to own up to his problems. I explored with him on a personal level ways to help him overcome this challenge. He eventually opened up and shared the past history of his challenges — his past employment and other areas of his life, including his relationships with family and friends. I pointed out to him objectively that it was indeed his attitude of not taking charge and always awaiting for others to put the "final piece" to the puzzle that resulted in his "non-completion" or "non-performance". It became obvious that "what he does in one thing is what he does in everything" — in this case, his unproductive attitude of abandonment has resulted in his "non-performance" throughout in his life — his career,

his relationships with others and his personal goals. Once he began to see this unhealthy trend in his thinking, he became aware of the root cause of his non-performance. However, to ensure that he took action to improve himself, he must be convinced of the benefits of the change. Here are some that were highlighted to him:

- His talent and competency were being suppressed due to his attitude of not taking charge;
- His poor performance did no justice to his good academic credentials from a prestigious university and his years of experience;
- His non-performance was affecting his leadership credibility;
- His non-performance came with hidden stress, affecting his well-being;
- His attitude of abandonment had affected his relationships with his immediate family; and
- If he took responsibility, resolved problems and took actions to chalk up some positive results, he would feel good about himself and, at the same time, look good in the eyes of others.

Since then, he has started owning up to the problems and started to take charge of his responsibilities. Over the years, I have noted vast improvement not only

in his workplace but also in his life. In fact, recently, he has been promoted from an executive to a manager. He has since become a more productive and happier person, both at work and in his life.

Provide the right solution

Leaders today can no longer be a "generalist"; addressing the people's problems on a surface level. They need to become a "specialist" in diagnosing the root cause of non-performance that are plaguing their people. They cannot just second-guess a problem and come up with a superficial solution to address the symptoms of non-performance. Of course, there are genuine reasons why some people are not performing. If, upon diagnosing, the reason for non-performance is because they really do not know what they are supposed to do, then it is the role of leaders to communicate clearly what is expected of them. If it is a situation where people do not know how to perform certain tasks due to the fact that it was their first time doing those tasks, then training and coaching should be provided. In the case, where people have become complacent then leaders should motivate and inspire their people to get out of their comfort zones. Leaders should recognise good performers and address specific issues that block people from performing. However, if the non-performance is due to a lack of equipment or resources, then the necessary support should be provided.

The great challenge of human capital management today is not just recruiting great talent, but getting people to engage their talent and help improve the company's performance. And, when talented people do not perform up to mark, it is time for leaders to look at what blocks performance, including the emotional aspects which resides within the individual. A Chinese proverb says it best, "A man's fortune must first be changed from within". Likewise, for a company's fortune to change, leaders must first look at what are within those individuals that block performance.