

Leadership, Temperament & Employee Motivation

Recently we had the opportunity to work a group of senior managers with a Fortune 100 consumer products company; let's call them Swifty's. There was a lot of conflict at among the management team and the recently constructed \$110 million facility was losing money for various reasons. However, the lack of cohesiveness added significantly to the confusion up and down the organizational food chain and to the financial hemorrhaging.

We were asked to analyze the issues and make recommendations. We heard that the method for selecting this first time, newly formed, new to the company, management team was the following metaphor, "We wanted to hire all thoroughbreds."

Horses are Partners Not Pets

I am not an aficionado of horse flesh, but I did grow up in the cattle business and we used quarter horses for working with cattle. Cowboys admire thoroughbreds, those long legged, hot blooded horses bred for speed. Thoroughbreds are too nervous to work with cattle, too leggy to stop short, too delicate and thin skinned to live half wild. Sam Riddle the owner of Man of War commented, "Thoroughbreds have an extra quality other than speed. Thoroughbreds don't cry."

The American quarter horse's name came from the fact that they were used to run quarter mile races. The quarter horse is cross between a hot blooded thoroughbred and, typically, a northern European (cold blooded) horse. The quarter horse is great for ranch work because of its sprinting ability where a horse might have to move like lightning to cut off an ornery steer. Its strength and size make it the best roping horse. They are often crossed with other breeds to produce a cow horse with "heart." And it has a lot of cow sense.

Of course there are other horse breeds in America: Arabian – fiery temperament, graceful, slender, elegant head, wide set eyes; Morgan – known for its athletic ability and strength. This horse could pull a plow all day and have energy left to prance home; Appaloosa – the distinctive spotted horses were once war ponies of the Nez Pearce; Draft Horses – large, immense strength, etc. All of these breeds have abilities, strengths and weaknesses. And each has their preferred job; based on their temperament.

Personality and Temperament

I realize the terms temperament and personality are somewhat broad and politically sensitive. I believe strongly, though, that a comprehensive understanding of leadership and employee motivation cannot exist without taking into account the temperament of the leader and follower and the communication match and/or mismatch of those personalities.

David Keirsey (1998) explains that "different personality temperaments prefer to receive and process information differently." The concept of temperament has a recent and rich history. Studies exploring temperament show that dissimilarity of communication had a negative influence on student performance and satisfaction. Learning was influenced by the degree of match between teacher and student preferred styles. Temperament similarity in marketing has been used as a means to match advertising imagery and sales pitches to individual personality types with positive results.

Obviously, leaders with different temperaments are found in all organizations. David Keirsey (1998: 295) points out "any of us, whatever our temperamental makeup, can be effective leaders, provided that we come to understand our own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of our followers, and provided that we show our appreciation whenever we note our followers contributing." I know that the ability of leaders to comprehend a follower's temperament, particularly when that temperament is different from their own, will enhance employee motivation to a greater degree than those leaders who either lack the capacity or will to do so. When a leader responds with behaviors and communication that matches the follower's preference, employee performance and willingness increases.

I do not believe that leaders or followers should try to change their temperament. Effective leaders, however, can alter their communication to be more effective. Effective in a way that followers would most willingly understand, respond to, and appreciate. Clearly, successful leaders express appreciation for their employee's efforts. Having said that, different employee temperaments respond to appreciation in different ways; with different verbiage, different behaviors, and different rewards. Again, the concept of "temperament match" implies that leaders demonstrate their appreciation in a way that specifically meets an individual follower's needs and enhances the relationship. Leaders who offer incentives fitting follower needs will enhance follower satisfaction.

It is clear that certain temperament styles do influence leader behavior. In examining the effective leadership and follower-performance outcome link, leaders must:

- Provide challenging work that is valued;
- Consider the ability of the follower;
- Recognize the variances in follower self-esteem and self-concept;
- Articulate clear goals and performance outcomes;
- Understand the correlation between individual followers and job satisfaction;
- Understand that the attractiveness of outcomes will vary with individual differences;
- Align the goals of followers with those of the organization; and
- Understand that followers' needs can change as they go throughout life.

Further, there are three follower beliefs that strengthen their performance-outcome link:

- The follower must have trust and believe that the leader will deliver a relevant reward;
- The follower must receive equitable, predictable treatment; and
- The leader must give clear, honest feedback.

What is the moral of this story? Through the years, various scholars have offered roughly 140 definitions of motivation, nearly all of which focus on the notion of sustaining effort

toward some desired goal. As the knight in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade said, “You must choose wisely.” If you hire all thoroughbreds expect that the people you hire will act like thoroughbreds. If you hire thoroughbreds, put them in the job that matches their strengths and minimizes the effect of their weaknesses.

In Swifty’s case, they all were running the race for themselves without too much attention to the needs of the facility or the company. Swifty’s got what they were looking for. But they didn’t want what they got. Four years after the facility opened, it was closed and sold. The management group never did congeal into a productive team. The losses in financial and human terms were immense.