

Leadership instalments

Make Every Performance Count

By Dan Gaynor

MY EXPERIENCE HAS CONVINCED ME THAT EVERY GOOD leader is not caring or demanding, but both. When we think of the most inspiring leaders we've worked for we usually remember them as fairly demanding – they insisted on our best. At the same time we knew they cared about us.

Caring about every employee's success brings leaders face to face with the big questions about people and the work they do and all great leaders want to approach these questions in a way that is good for both employees and the organization. I believe the place where employee's needs come together with those of the organization is at job fit and it's one of the most foundational concepts I teach.

So let's start with those needs, they form the two dimensions by which we should measure every employment relationship – productivity and job satisfaction. When we are doing work we have talent for, for leaders and organizations that value our contributions, we are invariably both satisfied and productive and both needs are met.

The two prerequisites of job fit are: talent and motivation. Talent is the stuff we are born with, the raw material. When talent is trained and we get the right experience it underpins productivity and job satisfaction. I learned a long time ago that I do not have a talent for math. Trying to make me into an accountant or mathematician would be an exercise in frustration for everyone involved and it would be a painful and frustrating exercise for me, but I have other talents. The key to lasting productivity and job satisfaction then is matching talent to work. While this might seem obvious a lot of people are doing work they'll never do very well or feel very good about.

Talent alone is not enough. We also need motivation. We must enjoy our work as well as the person and the organization we work for. When we're working in an area of genuine talent we always enjoy it provided we work for a good leader. When talent and motivation come together lasting job satisfaction and productivity are the natural outcomes and everyone gets what they need. So every great team-



building leader is in a constant search for job fit with each and every employee. Through job fit leaders build high performance teams one individual at a time. As I repeat constantly with my clients, "Great leaders surface and resolve the big questions about people and the work they do." And job fit becomes their reference point.

This is why great leaders make every performance matter. They know that performance is the dashboard indicator for job fit. When performance is strong and the employee enjoys the work, we can be fairly sure of job fit and a strong productive relationship. When someone is consistently missing targets and performing below others in the role, job fit questions arise and it's time to look under the hood. At these points, great leaders get involved more closely with extra feedback and coaching. If performance improves it was just a matter of experience. If it does not, they've confirmed that job fit is the issue and they must make a change for the individual and the organization. The most frustrating situations I came across during my newspaper career were those where I knew there were genuine job fit issues that previous leaders had passed by sometimes for years.

When job fit is the issue nothing improves until the individual moves into work that is a better fit. Delaying these changes - and at times leaders have to force them – is not the work of a caring leader. While you can't guarantee that everyone who leaves your company will find the right job next time you can know for certain that they won't even get the chance by staying in the wrong one.

For more on the fundamentals of building strong productive teams call for a workshop.

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Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:
tel 403.880.1780
email dan@gaynorconsulting.com