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### **FIRST BREAK ALL THE RULES**

What the Worlds Greatest managers do differently.

Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman

Pages: 362

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### **INTRODUCTION FROM THE PUBLISHER:**

Great managers share one common trait: They do not hesitate to break virtually every rule held sacred by conventional wisdom. They do not believe that, with enough training, a person can achieve anything he sets his mind to. They do not try to help people overcome their weaknesses. They consistently disregard the golden rule. And, yes, they even play favorites. This amazing book explains why. The frontline manager is the key to attracting and retaining talented employees. No matter how generous its pay or how renowned its training, the company that lacks great front-line managers will suffer. Buckingham and Coffman explain how the best managers select an employee for talent rather than for skills or experience; how they set expectations for him or her - they define the right outcomes rather than the right steps; how they motivate people - they build on each person's unique strengths rather than trying to fix his weaknesses; and, finally, how great managers develop people - they find the right fit for each person, not the next rung on the ladder

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### **SUMMARY:**

#### **FIRST BREAK ALL THE RULES**

Conventional management wisdom suggests that a good manager has to fix employees weaknesses, treat everyone equally, treat people as they themselves would like to be treated, and that each employee has unlimited potential if they would only try hard enough.

In truth, great managers treat everyone differently. Nor do they try and fix their employees weaknesses. Instead,

they believe that each individual has unique talents and motivations. They spend more time helping their best performers excel than helping weaker team members improve.

Over the last 25 years the Gallop organization has conducted 2 major research studies involving over 1 million employees and 80,000 managers. Gallop wanted to find what elements attracted and kept talented employees in an organization. improves shareholder value. During their research Gallop found that the most significant factor in attracting and keeping talented employees was the quality and effectiveness of the employees' immediate manager. They also found that highly talented and productive employees would answer affirmatively to the following 12 questions.

- 1) I know what is expected at me at work
- 2) I have everything I need to do my work
- 3) I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day at work
- 4) In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for my good work.
- 5) My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- 6) There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- 7) At work, my opinions seem to count.
- 8) The mission/ purpose of my work makes me feel like my work is important.
- 9) My co-workers are committed to doing quality work.
- 10) I have a best friend at work.
- 11) In the last six months I have talked to someone about my progress.
- 12) I have had opportunities to learn and grow at work.

Gallop found that business units with employees that answered affirmatively to the above questions were more productive, profitable, and had higher levels of customer satisfaction. It became apparent the individual front line manager was an important factor in how the 12 questions were answered. Incentives such as salary, childcare, vacation and stock options were not as important as one might think. In all it seemed that "It is better to work for a great manager in an old fashioned company then a terrible manager in an enlightened company".

The path an employee takes from starting out in the role to peak performer is much like climbing a mountain consisting of the 12 steps (the 12 questions). At Base Camp (questions 1 and 2) the employee finds out what is expected of him and what he has at his disposal to do his job. At Camp One (Questions 3,4,5 and 6) the employee examines whether she thinks she is good at the role and what others think of her performance. Camp Two (questions 6,7,8 and 9) is where the employee wonders about his fit with the organization. The Summit is reached (Q11,12) when the employee has reached peak performance, and has the confidence to do the job.

An employee will traverse up and down the mountain on the way to the summit. A new job or promotion will put the employee back to Base Camp, as might a change in the organization (such as a new manager). All employees will have some trade-offs with the questions. One employee may not mind so much if he received little recognition as long as he's knows that the purpose of his work is important. On the other hand many employees who give negative answers to the lower questions with only positive responses to the latter questions (similar to catching a chopper to the summit) may experience a mountain sickness where they easily burn out.

So what makes great manager great? How do they create an environment with people strongly committed to answering yes to the 12 questions above? Great managers know that they can't change people. They know that everyone is fundamentally unique, that people can learn new skills and acquire new knowledge, but that they are unable to change their own unique nature. Instead, the great manager will try and draw out the individual's inner strengths and talents. They attempt to become a catalyst, reaching inside each employee to draw out the gifts that will make them outstanding performers.

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## HIRING THE RIGHT PERSON

Great managers excel at selecting the right personnel for any given role. When it comes to hiring the right person conventional wisdom says that you need to select a person based on their past experience, brainpower and willpower. This advice is often misguided. All of these things can be important, but the most important thing to hire a person for is talent.

Talents often seem like rare qualities possessed by only a few. The truth is that we all have them. Talent can be defined as reoccurring patterns of thought or behaviour that can be productively applied. You might have a talent for remembering names, or doing crosswords, for example.

Great managers understand the difference between talent, skills (which are trainable) and knowledge (which can be learnt). You cannot train or teach someone to have a talent. A talent might be assertiveness in a salesperson, empathy in a nurse, or the love of precision in an accountant. Talent is often a critical element needed to excel in a job. Knowledge or skills alone cannot account for the broad range of performance displayed by people on the job. The only difference between a peak performer and an average performer is talent. Take, for example, the fact that in a year the average truck driver does 125,000 miles on the road and has 4 accidents. A few exceptional drivers, however can drive for many millions of miles without a single accident. The difference is that while the average driver is thinking about home or the next coffee break, the outstanding driver spends his time trying to anticipate potential accidents or problems. That difference is driving talent.

There are three categories of talent.

- 1) Striving talents: The thing that motivates a person, whether it be competitiveness, the desire to do the right thing, stand out from the crowd, to be liked, sheer altruism, etc.
- 2) Thinking Talents: How the person mentally approaches a task. Are they a 'what if' strategic thinker, focused, disciplined, likes to work with structure or with chaos, etc.
- 3) Relating Talents: How the person relates to others. Who do they trust and why, who they confront, ignore, avoid etc.

Great managers realise that a person can't change an innate aspect of themselves. A training course is not going to make someone more competitive or less sceptical. Instead a good manager tries to match the talents of an individual with a role. The employee, rather than trying to become something they are not, can succeed by being more of what they already are.

In selecting for talent, you should identify exactly what kind of talents you need to fill the role. Do you need someone who is fiercely competitive, pays attention to detail, can be closely supervised, is a relator, assertive or disciplined. Identify a striving, relating and thinking talent for each role and work on selecting a person with those talents.

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## DEFINING THE RIGHT OUTCOME

Many managers feel the need to be very prescriptive and controlling in the way they want the job to be done. Often they believe that their way is the only way to do the job. Once the steps have been prescribed they delegate themselves to the role of policeman making sure that everyone is following the rules. This is not only very inefficient and demeaning to the person, it also hampers the employee using his or her individual talents to get the job done.

Great managers focus more on defining outcomes rather than individual steps. Defining outcomes has the many benefits. It allows the manager to set the same performance standards for everyone while allowing her to treat the team members as individuals. It is efficient -- allowing the individual staff member to find the quickest and

easiest way for them to reach the desired outcome. It also allows the employees to take responsibility and ownership for the actions and learn from their mistakes.

Some outcomes are easier to define than others, but that is no excuse for being overly prescriptive or controlling. For example, even though a sales quota is easier to define than customer service or employee moral levels, managers must dig deep to articulate all desired outcomes they expect from their employees.

Great managers understand that there are circumstances where prescribed steps or procedures are very valuable. All aspects of a role that deal accuracy and safely must incorporate prescribed steps or rules. A bank tellers handling of money or the safe handling of heavy machinery would both need procedures. Also when there is a company or industry standard then there should be prescribed steps. Lawyers must know their case law, and accountants their double entry book keeping

The manager's job is to ensure that the employees know the rules and are able to fulfil them. However they should ensure that the procedures do not overshadow the outcome. In call centres where customer service is the prime objective there was a push to have customers calls answered within three rings. Often the employees were often so rushed to complete each call to get to the next, they were unable to completely answer all of the customer's questions. Customer satisfaction fell as a result.

There are four factors that encourage customer satisfaction.

- 1) Accuracy: The customer receives the correct order.
- 2) Availability: The bank is open when the customer needs it.
- 3) Partnership: The customer feels that they have been listened to and heard. Levis make 'made to order jeans'. Video stores have 'staff picks'.
- 4) Advice: Customers feel closer to those organizations that help them learn. For example, hardware stores might run DIY classes or a public accounting firm teaches customers how to manage their money.

While accuracy and availability can be achieved through prescribed procedures and roles, partnership and advice are much more difficult to build. A company must rely on the talent of individual employees to obtain them.

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### 3) FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

Great managers focus on the strengths of their employees rather than on their weaknesses. They try to draw out the unique and individual talents of all of their employees and will not allow themselves to make generalisations, such as "all accountants are shy".

Conventional wisdom often says that people can be anything they want to if they only try hard enough and that if we only focus on and fix our weaknesses we will find our greatest potential.

We all have many 'non-talents' but these only become weaknesses if you need to use that talent to perform in your job. If you need the talent of organization to do your job and you don't possess it, then organization is your weakness.

Great managers believe that each employee will only achieve greatness when they find a way to express their unique style. Working at non-talents will only cause frustration and resentment. The manager ends up working on the employee's weaknesses while ignoring their many strength.

Focusing on weaknesses is a recipe for a bad relationship between the manager and employee. When the employee is unable to fix the 'problems' they are left with the implicit blame for the problem. Their manager has

set them up for failure and handed them the blame when they haven't delivered.

When there is a performance problem great managers move quickly to ascertain the nature of the problem and rectify it. They first try to find out if the problem is a mechanical or technical problem, such as a system failure. It may be a personal problem such as a death in the family or a skills and knowledge problem that requires some training. It may be the result of the manager tripping the wrong triggers for the employee. If the problem is not caused by any of these factors then it is likely a problem with talent.

Great managers manage around an employee's weaknesses. They might make sure a poor speller always runs spell check on a document. One manager had an employee incapable of filling out monthly expense reports. Rather than berate her for her failure he simply had another, more organized, member of the team take care of them.

Many great leaders find partners with strengths to match their weaknesses. As a team they are very balanced. For example, at Disney Michael Eisner's exuberance is matched with the calm practicality of Frank Wells.

Great managers also spend more time with their best people, rather than with poor performers. You can only learn about excellence by studying your best people, not the under performers. If you spend more time with weaker performers you end up rewarding their behaviour with your attention. Those employees who are above average performers often have the greatest potential to grow and become exceptional in their role. For example, the average keystroke operator can complete 380,000 keystrokes a month. One manager had an employee who was doing over 500,000 a month. By working with this individual over a period of time the operator was able to reach well over 2 million keystrokes a month. The department now punches double the national average of keystrokes a month.

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## FINDING THE RIGHT FIT.

At some time most managers will be approached by employees wanting to know what the next step is for them. Conventional wisdom is that you begin in a junior position and move up higher and higher through different roles until you reach the peak of your career.

The Peter Principle states that we promote people until they reach their level of incompetence. We do this because we make the assumption that each role up the ladder is a slightly more complicated version of the one preceding it. We link things like, pay, perks and prestige to the rung on the ladder creating pressure for people to make the climb upwards whether they are suited to the role or not. We also become confused what is trainable and make no distinction between skills, knowledge and talents. The talents needed to sell are very different from those used to manage. There is no guarantee that any individual will possess both.

In the IT career path the first two steps are usually computer programmer and then systems analyst. While both roles appear to be similar there are some significant differences. Computer programmers use the thinking style called problem solving, where all the variables or pieces of the puzzle are given. System analysts on the other hand, require the thinking, where they are faced with incomplete data and need to play out different scenarios. There is no guarantee that a great computer programmer will become a good systems analyst, or even an average one. While the talents for these two jobs are not mutually exclusive, they are not the same.

Great managers try to direct employees to roles that match their talents. But what with the pressure to move upwards and onwards, how do managers handle good employees who are not intrinsically suited to the next role above up the ladder.

1) Graded levels of achievement: Great managers believe that any role performed at an excellent level is

valuable. They give their employees the opportunity to become experts in their own role. This is something that the legal profession has been doing for a long time. When a law graduate enters a law firm they generally start with the position of junior associate, then move up to associate and senior associate. After a number of years they are maybe offered some equity in the firm and move on to become a junior partner, partner and senior partner. Throughout all these promotions the senior partner is still practicing essentially the same law as he was all those years ago as a junior associate, but with more experience and all the pay and prestige associated with it. This model could be applied to any position where excellence is valued.

2) Broad banded Pay Plan: Great managers want to see employees rewarded in direct proportion to the value they are creating within the company. Every role performed exceptionally adds value to the organization. Many roles are intrinsically more valuable than others - the CEO adds more value than the cleaner. However many roles performed at an excellent level are more valuable than a more senior role performed at an average level. A brilliant teacher might be more valuable than a novice principal or a superstar waitress of more value than a mediocre restaurant manager.

Broad banded pay is where the top end of the lesser value job overlaps with the bottom end of the higher value job.

At Disney an exceptional waiter in a first class restaurant can earn up to \$60,000 a year while the starting pay for a manager is as low as \$25,000. While the manager who excels can earn much more than \$60,000 a great waiter wanting to move onto the manager path must take a hefty pay cut. Employees in this situation will think long and hard before moving into management, and will only do so if they feel there is a unique match between their talents and the role.

3) Use creativity to revolt against the system. If you are in an organization that doesn't offer broad banding or multiple career paths then you may need to use some creativity in order to value your high achievers. Brian Jay was the manager in charge of some outstanding graphic designers in a company where major benefits and perks were only given to those who actually managed staff. Brian asked the designers if they could mentor some of the junior members of staff and informed HR that mentoring was as good as managing. HR eventually allowed the designers to have additional benefits.

Many people don't pick the right career or role for themselves the first time. Average employees tend to move blindly up the career path without giving consideration to their unique skills. Great managers will help their employees in their quest to find suitable roles by giving the feedback and insight that the employees need.

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