

FIRST, BREAK ALL THE RULES

What the World's Greatest
Managers Do Differently

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MAIN IDEA

Managing employees productively is exceptionally hard to achieve. It takes a deft touch to be able to balance all the competing interests -- the company's, the customer's, the employee's and the manager's own interests to name just a few. Yet some managers consistently do just that, while others flounder and fail.

Over a 25-year period, the Gallup Organization surveyed employees and managers to try and identify the patterns of success great managers use. This analysis showed:

- Great managers do not believe that every person, given enough training, can do anything they set their mind to.
- Great managers do not, in fact, try and help people overcome their weaknesses.
- Great managers play favorites, and treat their employees quite differently.

In fact, there emerged four keys that great managers use to draw exceptional performance from those they are responsible for:

1. Great managers select employees for their talents, not for their skills or experience.
2. Great managers set specific and high expectations -- they define the right outcome and leave the method up to the employee.
3. Great managers motivate by building on strengths rather than dwelling on or trying eliminate weaknesses.
4. Great managers find the appropriate career path -- the next rung on the corporate ladder -- for each employee.

If these keys to unlocking world-class performance work for the great managers, it makes sense for everyone interested in producing similar results to study these keys and implement them in the context of their own business requirements.

Background 1 -- The 25-Year Gallup Survey of Employees Page 2

Front-line managers and their association with the employees with whom they work has a far greater impact on business performance than any other factor. The companies that achieve the most have managers that succeed in building the strongest and most robust associations with their employees.

Background 2 -- The 25-Year Gallup Survey of Managers Page 3

The conventional wisdom is that good managers:

1. Select new employees by their experience and intelligence.
2. Set them targets.
3. Provide motivation.
4. Develop employees to become future managers.

The Gallup survey, however, found that in reality, the best and most effective managers:

1. Select new employees on the basis of existing talent.
2. Specify outcomes -- leaving employees to use initiative.
3. Focus on building strengths.
4. Help employees find the right fit rather than the next rung.

The Four Keys of Great Managers

Key #1 -- Select Employees For Talent Page 4

Talent, in this context, is not genius. It's a recurring pattern of successful behavior that can be productively applied. Good managers believe talent is more important than experience, intelligence or willpower. Therefore, talent in a particular field is the only criteria on which great managers select new employees.

Key #2 -- Define The Right Outcomes Page 5

Defining the right outcome is all about setting expectations of what should be achieved rather than specifying how it should be done. Great managers articulate precisely what should be achieved, and then trust in the abilities of their people to find the best way to achieve that goal.

Key #3 -- Focus on Building Strengths Page 6

The emphasis here is on helping people become more of what they already are rather than trying to iron out their rough spots. Great managers do everything they can to help their people cultivate their talents even further, and manage around their weaknesses. It's an individualized rather than a generalized approach.

Key #4 -- Find the Right Fit Page 7

Great managers realize that not every employee wants to --or should -- move onwards and upwards in the company, particularly if they are currently positioned precisely where their talents are used to best effect. Therefore, great managers create alternative career paths that more accurately match their employee needs.

Putting the Four Keys Into Action Page 8

The four keys are not a structured series of steps that every manager should take. Rather, they are a way of thinking that you can adapt to meet your main objective as a manager -- to find effective ways to turn each employee's talents into real-world performance.

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