Are Your Employees Emotionally Equipped to Handle Their Jobs? Are You?



By Paula Santonocito

Your employees may have the credentials, the experience, and the hard skills required for the job. But are they emotionally equipped to handle what the position entails and its challenges?

Before you say, yes, step back and consider your workforce.

For example, what's the deal with that former dynamo? Why isn't Sheila cutting it in a supervisory role? And everybody's friend, Brad; he's no longer the department's go-to guy. Brad was in line for additional responsibility, and a raise. Now the department manager has begun to question her judgment about Brad.

Assessing the Situation

Skills. Experience. Credentials. The criteria against which job candidates are evaluated prior to hiring are the same criteria organizations typically rely on when deciding whether to promote employees.

Makes sense, right?

Yet, where today's job candidates often also go through a screening process that involves behavioural interview questions and personality testing, rarely are similar assessments, formal or otherwise, applied to job promotions. The thought is we know Brad. Brad's good people. Or, we like Sheila. She's worked for us for years and has always done a great job. Both Brad and Sheila will shine in their new roles.

Early on, success seems even more likely because both Brad and Sheila express an interest in the new positions.

But did the job candidates—even though they are employees, in these instances they are job candidates—consider how the new positions fit with who they are? Did HR and their managers help them realistically assess the opportunities?

Generally, people know certain things about themselves and steer away from those careers for which they aren't suited. If a person can't stand the sight of blood, she won't become a doctor. Or, if someone doesn't like air travel, pilot and flight attendant won't be on a list of career choices.

There are similar correlations with regard to certain job details. For example, it's generally understood that a job in sales involves competition. Work in newspaper production, on the other hand, requires adherence to daily deadlines.

However, other aspects of a job may not be as apparent, and may not be taken into consideration. As a result, people might not even realize a particular component of a job doesn't mesh with who they are—at least not until they come up against it.

And by that time, well, Brad and Sheila are already in their new roles—roles where, incidentally, their managers think all they need to do is adapt. Brad and Sheila may be thinking the same. In some situations, this may be true. In others, though, aspects of the job may not be in sync with who they are. When this occurs, there's usually no getting around it; what needs to change for these employees is the job or aspects of it.

Getting Personal

It's important to note that what's going on in an employee's personal life also impacts him or her, and has the potential to affect career success.

If a person is dealing with a serious family illness, for example, it may not be the best time to take on new responsibilities at work.

In a similar vein, if someone has recently gone through a divorce, and is still finding her footing as far as solo bill paying, it's probably not the best time to switch from a salaried to a commission-based sales job.

Even if people don't have personal circumstances impacting their careers, they may find themselves at a point in life where their priorities have changed.

Employees in their 20s and 30s may have been willing to travel for business; but those same employees, now in their 40s, might find business travel more stressful than glamorous.

After Assessing

Once an employee learns what is required of the job in the context of other aspects of life—ideally, before in the new role—he can decide whether or not he can meet the requirements.

Keep in mind, the answer could be no. If this is the case, the employee shouldn't be made to feel badly about it—particularly if he is a valued member of the workforce.

If reluctance to take on a new role is related to pressing personal circumstances, it may be a matter of timing. In other words, don't write Sheila off; she might be a great manager at another point in her career.

However, it's also possible that Sheila doesn't want to run the show because it doesn't fit with who she is.

Like it or not, it's up to HR and managers to understand and address employees' needs, including emotional ones, as they relate to career and life choices. Only by doing so can you create a positive, productive environment—one where employees are happy to work and contribute.

And by the way, the same prescription for a happy career applies to HR professionals.