

Plantline Management Column

Submitted by Keith Ayers

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The Best Managers Break All the Rules

In their recent book *First, Break All The Rules*, Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman of the Gallup organisation reveal what great managers do differently to ordinary managers. Their conclusions were based on research of in-depth interviews with more than 80,000 managers at all levels and in companies of all sizes.

Basically what they are saying is that the best managers break all the rules of conventional wisdom about how to manage people. Some time ago I wrote in this column about the “secrets of creating a great workplace”. This month I want to focus on what the best managers do differently to the ordinary managers to create that great workplace.

There are four basic keys that these managers use to create a great workplace... and it is worth remembering that a “great workplace” was defined as one that delivered the highest levels of productivity, profitability, employee retention and customer satisfaction.

The first key is to **Select for Talent not Experience**. Do you know what talents you are looking for? A good place to start is to identify the talents that your best employees have. Don't look at their experience; look for the talents that make them better than the ordinary employee. You will probably find that their attitude has a lot to do with their success. Another major contributing factor to *talent* is *emotional intelligence*.

So instead of poring over candidates' resumes to see whether they have the most appropriate experience, try coming up with some questions that determine whether they have the emotional competencies Daniel Goleman identified in his book *Working With Emotional Intelligence*: Self-Awareness; Self-Regulation (or self-control); Self-Motivation; Empathy; and Interpersonal Skills.

The second key is **Define the Right Outcomes**. The best managers understand that people do not perform best when they are being *controlled*. Ordinary managers believe they have to control the process to get the best results. They tell people not only what to do, but also how to do it and often write detailed policies and procedures for their people to follow to ensure that everything is done perfectly.

The best managers focus only on defining the outcomes they want and allow their people to use their own talents to determine how to achieve them. They let their employees develop the policies and procedures that will achieve the best outcomes.

If you have difficulty letting go of control, perhaps you should ask yourself why you don't trust your people to do the job. The Chinese have a saying: “Hire only people you can trust... then trust them.” If you don't trust your people to figure out the best way to achieve your outcomes, why did you hire them?

The third key is **Focus on Strengths**. There is a tendency among some managers to take people's strengths for granted and pay more attention to their weaknesses. Do you know what your employees' strengths are? The best managers know that they can't fix people... that everyone has weaknesses, but

they also have strengths. So they focus on capitalising on those strengths by making sure their employees have the opportunity to use them. It helps if you hire for talent to start with as you'll know what their strengths are.

The fourth and final key is to **Find the Right Fit**. In most companies, promotion to the next level is seen as inevitable. And so the Peter Principle is alive and well... *people are promoted to their level of incompetence!* The best managers steer people into the roles that best utilise their talents, whether that is a promotion, a lateral move or a demotion. If you have promoted your best salesman to become the sales manager and not only is he a lousy sales manager, your sales have dropped... it's obvious what you should do, isn't it?

Maybe your remuneration and reward systems penalise people if they are not promoted (or are demoted). If that is the case, change the system. The number one priority is to get the right people into the role that best uses their talents.

First, Break All the Rules challenges the way companies have been traditionally run and one of the barriers to change is always the existing culture. Both managers and employees will resist change if your culture will not support a change of this nature. If you would like to take a *snapshot* of your organisation's culture to assess your perception of its readiness for change, email us at support@integro.com.au for a complimentary (one-person) culture survey.

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