

Recently, I spent an evening with my very good friend, Dr. Bruce DeRuntz, discussing the age-old question of how to get an individual to give you their best. How do you prevent someone who has tremendous potential from “coasting” and giving you only what they find “comfortable”? We’ve all faced the situation where we know an individual can achieve more but they simply don’t live up to their full potential. Few things are as frustrating to a respected leader as knowing one of your team members has much more to give but they’ve decided to hold back on you and the team. To successfully address this, first, we have to analyze the situation and understand the dynamics involved.

Their situation may be the result of conflicting interests or differing priorities. Our society is on an ever-increasing treadmill of activity that is dramatically speeding up and increasing in complexity every day. Many different interests and activities appeal to us to meet our needs and desires...all competing for our time and attention. If the issue is competing priorities, we have to make a strong business case for why our request for their time and energy is worth more of their effort and commitment! The key issue for these people is to clearly define the “WIIFM” or “What’s In It For Me”? People always make time to do the things they want to do.

Often the problem is one of “short-term focus”. This is an easy-to-recognize situation where the individual is focusing their time and efforts on things and activities that provide immediate gratification and results. While this is sometimes appropriate, focusing exclusively on the immediate at the expense of the long-term is incredibly short-sighted. As a coach, I’m amazed at how many people fail to fully understand that their short-term behavior can be very expensive in the long run! Our best opportunity to help these individuals is to get them to see the long-term benefits more clearly and help them develop the determination and the discipline required to sacrifice things and pleasures today for much greater rewards tomorrow. Much easier said than done! For this effort to be worth your time and theirs, they have to want to change.

Sometimes their lack of effort is a failure of commitment and confidence. Occasionally, this is because they do not believe that they can do the things we know they can accomplish! This lack of faith in themselves is simple to recognize and oh-so-hard to overcome. In this situation, I have found that what I believe them capable of doing is almost irrelevant; until they themselves believe they can accomplish something, they will fail to deliver. In my coaching sessions, I often tell business executives “If you believe you can...You’re **Right!** If you believe you can’t...You’re **Right!**” Our ability to get the full measure out of our people is often directly related to our ability to inspire them and convince them that we believe in them. One of my greatest triumphs was when a trusted Mentor took me aside, chewed me out for not giving it my all, and told me that he would not be satisfied until I had shown him far more than I had to date. Embarrassed by what seemed to be an unwarranted “butt chewing”, I “sulked” for a couple of days. But his words kept haunting me...perhaps I could do more! I re-attacked the problem with his belief in me pushing me halfway and my determination not to disappoint him driving me the rest of the way. Standing next to him a week later reviewing the results was one of the proudest days of my career. I would have never accomplished that goal without someone pushing me harder than I wanted in order to do something I didn’t think I could do. Never underestimate the power of an individual who believes in you to help you break through the barriers and roadblocks of life!

An individual's failure to perform may be because they fail to see the point or the importance of what you are asking of them. The best approach here is to re-address your vision and objectives. Clearly state what you expect them to accomplish and why it is important. If we've done a poor job communicating or explaining the mission, we can't fault them for failing to get it done! Our obligation is to find a way to influence them that your mission and objective are theirs as well. Few people want to work extra hard simply to make someone else look good! They will, however, relentlessly pursue something that becomes as important to them as it is to you.

Occasionally, it's because they just don't have the inner drive or passion to put forth the effort to live up to their full potential. I often find that the things I see in them and the capabilities they could develop are not the things they want to do in life. If you are the leader you should be, you will recognize the signs and the situation. We have to be able to recognize that one thing we can never do is make someone care. Some of my biggest disappointments as a program manager have been discovering that someone on my team just doesn't care about what we are doing. The "clock punchers" and "placeholders" will always be among us. We often hire these people despite our best attempts to "weed them out" during the interview process. They occasionally develop this attitude on the job as a result of several frustrating attempts to succeed and they then blame "the system" for their failure. They will always be able to explain why it is not their fault...they seldom seem to be able to explain what they are going to do to change the outcome. If, after your best efforts and several different approaches, you fail to motivate and encourage these people--cut them loose. Allow them to find another situation and a different team where they can be productive. It is not our job to make people happy. It is our job to excite people and help them achieve their full potential and to give them the opportunity to develop into a great leaders that can take what we've started and move the team to even higher accomplishments! The single greatest accomplishment any leader can achieve is to create countless other leaders even greater than themselves. Who are you going to motivate today?

If you have a question or an issue you would like to see addressed in this column, contact me at [askthecoach@x-slg.com](mailto:askthecoach@x-slg.com)

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