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INVENTORY YOUR PEOPLE

Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad company. -- George Washington

Several effective CEOs were asked to name the single most important key to their success. They said: Recognize destructive no-win situations with people inside and outside your company early. then cut your losses and move on.

Negative situations with difficult people can bring a potentially great company to its knees. CEOs and COOs can accomplish this by performing a "Corporate House Cleaning" every six months. The first step is to take an inventory of your people.

Inventory Your People

You can inventory your people by placing them in one of four categories:

- Destructive
- Difficult
- Good
- Great

<p>Difficult Contrary Can but Won't Arrogant Just say "No!"</p>	<p>GREAT Committed Can and Will Lion King or Queen Just say "Yes!"</p>
<p>DESTRUCTIVE Combative Can't and Won't Jerk Just say "Bye"</p>	<p>GOOD Cooperative Can and Will (with guidance) Great Team Player Just say "Thanks"</p>

Four Categories of People: Descriptions

1. Destructive people keep you up at night. They are not just rebels without a cause; they are rebels without a clue. They are the "know-it-all" who don't know what they're talking about. When you cross them, they can become verbally combative or abusive. You dread having to see or deal with them. You appease or avoid them because they infuriate you. They contaminate your

company as more worthy and conscientious employees see superiors "greasing these squeaky wheels."

2. Difficult people don't keep you up at night. Instead, they keep other people in your company awake. They are arrogant and talk down to other employees. As contrary as they are, your company keeps them because it needs their talents or abilities. You have to weigh the value they bring to your company against the problems they create.
3. Good people are your foot soldiers. They are cooperative, "salt of the earth," and great team players. They do their job without creating problems for you. Regardless of the chaos in your company, they do a good job because they're responsible and grown up.
4. Great people are your stars and the future of your company because of their talent and commitment. They'll stay awake at night trying to figure out a better way to do something for your company. They're the ones who enable you and your executives to get a good night's sleep because you feel how dedicated they are to your company.

The best way to deal with destructive individuals is to utilize a simple tool called the "Self-Other Inventory." On a sheet of paper write down the individual's name at the top and draw four vertical columns. From left to right, label the top of each column as follows: **What I Can Rely on Other For; What I Can't Rely on Other For; What Other Can Rely on Me For; What Other Can't Rely on Me For.**

Along the left side of the page, list areas including competence, accountability, attitude and team playing. With regard to attitude, you might write: "I can rely on this person to do the bare necessities of the job if he is not annoyed about something. Or, I can't rely on him to do a job without making mistakes, then blaming others or making excuses."

Other options include: "He can rely on me to give him a warning and a chance to improve his work" and "He can't rely on me to endlessly tolerate his sloppy work and negative attitude."

Difficult people may be arrogant, but they're not stupid. They want to get results, but they have big egos. Their intimidating, condescending attitude frequently makes people afraid to tell them when things go wrong. If they don't find out about problems, they can't correct them and they're going to get poor results.

Then the employee is the one who is going to be in the embarrassing position of having to explain what went wrong. If you can't find a way to keep employees from upsetting people around them, give them their own space and skilled, thick-skinned assistants to run interference between them and the rest of the company. Employers often take good workers for granted while their concerns are tied up with other combative and contrary people. Companies can usually get away with ignoring them, but it is wrong to do so. Letting the people who don't care about your company stop you from expressing your gratitude and rewarding those who do is one of the most common pitfalls that less-than-great companies fall into.

A little acknowledgment goes a long way with good workers. Keep reminders in your day planner of times to show appreciation to these loyal, trouble-free people. Finally cut them slack when they make mistakes, because they will own up to them, seek and accept ways to correct them and learn from them.

Give your great people every opportunity to grow and flourish. Don't stymie and frustrate them with verbal green lights that are usually followed by a red light and your explanation of: "We changed our mind." Nurture them with respect, responsibility and authority -- and eventually a piece of the business. They are the future of your company and your most valuable resource.

Topgrading, or the act of "filling every position in the organization with an A-player,"¹ has become all the rage in today's business market, and rightly so given the shortage of top talent that's looming on the horizon. But how feasible is it for companies - especially smaller firms with limited resources - to completely fill their ranks with top performers?

While larger companies have the wherewithal to hire and retain A-players, smaller companies may question whether they have the ability to compete in this talent war. The good news is this: all companies, *regardless of size*, have the ability to engage in certain activities to optimize the performance of their team.

Here are 4 ways to improve the caliber of your team:

1. Fire your poor performers.

It's a bold move - but firing your poor performers is the absolute best way to initiate your topgrading process.

Topgrading your corporate team is sort of like cleaning out your closet - you wouldn't throw all your clothes away, but you'd definitely get rid of the pieces that are out of style, out of date, or simply out of sync with the rest of your wardrobe.

Likewise, overall performance must be considered when re-evaluating the members of your team, and whether or not their performance is compatible with your company's vision and goals. While you may not have the luxury of replacing your entire team with top performing A-players, you can certainly remove the low performing C-players. You'll be amazed at the resulting lift in employee morale and productivity.

2. Align abilities with the appropriate roles.

In some cases, poor performance can result from individuals being put into positions where their skills and qualifications are misaligned with the expectations of their roles. The job that they're doing now may not be the same one that they initially signed up for or their skills and experience may have evolved - and their productivity is suffering as a result.

Take a good look at your teams - it's possible that you may have A-players in your midst, but you may have them mired in mediocrity completing tasks that are inconsistent with their aptitudes. All players should be placed in positions where they can achieve maximum success and so-called "B-players" can sometimes blossom if they're re-aligned into roles where they can excel and engage with their work.

3. Not all A-players need to be managers.

While it makes sense that a company would want to recognize a top performer's success with greater responsibility, if this person is uncomfortable with management duties, you'll end up losing an A-player and gaining a C-manager. Let's face it - some A-players are simply exceptional at operations and execution, and they like it that way. Promoting these people out of their comfort zone doesn't always work - and a failed promotion can be detrimental to the company's long-term goal of attracting, hiring and retaining more A-players for their firm.

Bad management breeds a corporate culture of disappointment and disenchantment, which leaves top performers unsatisfied and looking elsewhere for better opportunities. People leave *bosses*, not companies, and unhappiness with management (even those who were previously A-players) will affect employee turnover the most.

4. Engage, retain and develop *high potentials*.

Despite your best efforts to focus on employee retention, some A-players will still leave your company - and when they do, you must be prepared to deal with their absence. One solution is to identify and nurture the *high potential* employees already at your firm. They may not all be A-players now, but with mentorship, education and proper coaching, many of these individuals can be effectively engaged and groomed to become the future A-players of your organization.

Topgrading may seem like a lofty goal for some businesses, but half the task is simply an exercise in re-evaluation and re-organization. As much as it's about attracting new A-level talent to your company it's also about refreshing and optimizing the human capital you already have - something which *all* companies have the ability to do (and which many smart companies have already done!).

1Smart, Bradford D., Ph.D. *Topgrading*. Penguin Group: 2005.

- *Bruce Powell, Managing Partner, held senior management roles in marketing and communications before finding his true calling in executive search.*