

SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES



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When a business grows, it is often the case that the employees there at the start are promoted or given more responsibility. This can be for many reasons. It can be a way in which business owners reward employees for their work in building the business, or it can be out of necessity that, as a business grows, employees adopt more responsibility and gradually that morphs into a new job.

There is a common perception that a high-performing employee will make a good manager, or that a highly skilled employee in Job A will also be a highly skilled employee in Job B. But what if this isn't true? A new job may not suit the employee or their talents. I see many examples of a top salesperson or technical whiz who then fails as a manager. The only time that past performance in Job A accurately predicts future performance in Job B is when both jobs require virtually the same skills, talents and competencies. If the new job is different, it may require a different composition of skills, talents or better quality ones, or a different set of behavioral traits.

If this is a situation that has occurred in your business, there can be dangers in simply accepting it or burying your head in the sand. Having square pegs in round holes can impede your future business growth (and can send you backwards), can result in people management issues, and creates business risk.

So what do you do if you suspect that you don't have the right people in the right roles? The important thing is not to sweep it under the rug where it can fester and become a problem that can affect your business future. You have an obligation not only to yourself to deal with the situation but also to every individual working within your business.

If you have found that your business is in this situation, all is not lost and you are definitely not alone. There are many steps you can take and wise businesses will undertake some of these as a matter of course. Establishing effective systems can assist in ensuring that you detect this problem early. Performance appraisals and peer reviews can provide an objective picture and will also document the reason for any performance management actions. Have an honest constructive discussion with the employee; they may readily admit they are struggling and welcome discussing a solution.

Consider training as a solution. Can you up-skill your employee so they grow into the role? Often people are promoted to a people management role without being given any management training. Another option is to provide a mentor.

As a last resort, you may need to consider a restructure or performance management actions. There are many legal implications that can arise from these actions. Remember you cannot simply demote or dismiss a person without good reason and without the right process. It is crucial that you get

advice to guide you through the process.

Case study

Company A underwent a period of great growth, which led to the creation of a General Manager position. Alan, a Senior Salesperson who had a key role in growing the business was promoted to the role.

A year down the track, there was unrest in the team and the business began losing staff as they did not feel valued. Business reports were not completed on time and did not include the level of detail expected from a General Manager. Worryingly, productivity declined at the same time.

The business owner found that the problem stemmed from the manner in which their General Manager, Alan, communicated with employees. Alan, while great at growing the business, did not feel comfortable handling staff issues and could appear condescending to staff. Things were falling through the cracks, as Alan was not good at time management and lacked the financial analysis skills needed in his new role. These were all things contrary to being a successful General Manager. Alan admitted he had lost all enjoyment in his job and was thinking of resigning. Company A faced losing Alan, who was previously responsible for achieving great sales results, and had a team that was in disarray.

To address this situation, the owner undertook a documented performance appraisal with Alan, which led to an honest discussion about Alan's shortcomings. A new role, of Sales and Marketing Manager was developed for Alan which built on his sales strengths. Alan's acceptance of this new role meant the business did not have to undergo performance management with Alan and potentially lose an employee who had previously produced such great results for the business.

The business recruited specifically for a new General Manager who had the right experience and skills. Part of the new General Manager's role was also to mentor Alan so that a succession plan was created.

Conclusion

Having square pegs in round holes is more than just an inconvenience. It can lead to serious business problems and legal risk. Jobs are more than titles and the success of your business lies in having the right people in the right jobs. Higher-level jobs need more and better competencies and business owners need to make an honest assessment of their business and think about actions they may need to undertake to improve their overall team.

Without undertaking this review, business owners may face numerous risks which are completely avoidable, so take the time to think this through and solidify your base so you can then look forward to your next stage of business growth. ■

Robyn Anderson is a fellow of Australian Human Resources Institute and the Managing Director of HR Navigation Australia, an HR/workplace relations consultancy specialising in providing outsourced HR manager services to small and medium businesses. To contact HR Navigation, call 1300 669 747 or visit www.hrnavigation.com.au