



AWARDING MEDALS BEFORE THEY'VE GONE INTO BATTLE

I recently saw a post on a social network; it was a re-post of an alleged list that a new employee found on their door the first day of work. It was a thoughtful list, containing such items as “Don’t worry about calling in sick,” “It’s OK to have an off day” and “It’s OK to not know it all; [it’s] OK to be quiet.” I read the list, and although compelling and compassionate, I wondered what kind of tone this sets for the company or managerial expectations? Is it one that’s truly representative of the business’ culture — the ability for employees to show up when they want or if and when they feel like it?

I have noticed a change in the last few years of the mindset established during the onboarding process with new employees. A sense of entitlement and accomplishment creeps in before the employee pencils their first deal or sets up their desk — if they are lucky enough to have a desk in the first place. I remember sharing a desk with a bunch of other new hires until I had earned the right to have my own workspace. And, please do not tell me it’s this generation or Millennials because I refuse to allow these fine people to be categorized that way, or in *any* way.

Let’s assume that anyone hired is qualified; the assumptions, however, should stop there. Managers face enough challenges with new recruits and retaining employees; we shouldn’t make it more complicated by anointing people before they even know your culture, your specific skill sets and processes, the “go to” people in the organization or have produced a single thing. We are not paid as an industry on hope, promise or potential. We receive compensation based on our *production*. It makes no sense to give special treatment to anyone two minutes into their tenure, especially if you are not already rewarding your proven team members.

It’s vital to provide tools and support to your whole team to succeed, whether they’ve been on your team for three months or three years. Creating a welcoming atmosphere in the beginning days is just part of a great work culture. Being welcoming and providing an open environment shouldn’t include a “here are the keys to the store” approach. Any team looks to its leader(s) to determine what actions, beliefs and goals are important. If you are skipping past the goals and going straight to the reward, you are setting a tone of complacency — that low or no production reaps rewards and recognition.

There is no such thing as “fair”; however, there *is* equitable. If you give someone the biggest office and desk on their first day as a new hire for any position other than the owner, then what does that employee have left to achieve? Furthermore, what message does that send to more-established employees? What do you offer the next hire? Build a bigger office for them upon employment? My grandfather always told me “the world needs ditch diggers, too.” He knew not everyone walking into his office would be a manager. He was aware that every role was important, as long as the role and goals were defined with expectations communicated clearly, along with the support to complete the work assigned, and to meet and exceed his/her expectations.

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We feel obligated to overcompensate new hires with the “welcome” because of a lack of leadership and frank discussion of expectations. In exchange, we feel the need to make other items look appealing to keep them. Other times, it’s because we overestimate the need of the new employee versus underestimating the needs of the experienced team member. Experienced team members have mastered the culture, and help you exceed your expectations on a daily basis. We somehow overlook that healthy work environments challenge their established employees to think about the next achievement, the next mountain to conquer; established employees desire — and deserve — your continued guidance and help to move forward.

Here are a few things to keep in mind with new hires:

- **Be welcoming and informative.** Providing information will help your new employee succeed, and making yourself accessible for questions is the reward that keeps on giving well beyond the “honeymoon” period.
- **Be supportive and provide tools and education that will lead to high production and, in turn, the success that leads to rewards.** The best support we, as leaders, can provide not just our new employees but to our team is *support*. Support in knowledge. Support in the form of consistent feedback on the positive and opportunities for growth, and ongoing training to so your new hire can effectively do their job.
- **Provide clear roles and goals.** One manager for whom I worked made it his mission that, during any new hire orientation week, he present the new employee with their job description, the team’s collective goals and his individual goals for that person, so from Day One they knew the expectations. They knew where they fit in the big picture, and that the manager wanted them to be successful out of the gate.
- **Expect and demand performance.** At the end of the day, every employee has to produce. Top performers receive accolades for their production, not for merely showing up when they want.
- **Do not confuse “encouragement” and “entitlement.”** “Encouragement” recognizes the actual effort made and production realized. “Entitlement” is the notion of rewarding a person for merely “showing up.”

Remember the sergeants, corporals and field grunts that got you the victories in battle, and award them the medals they have earned. Don’t hand out medals to the recruit on their first day of boot camp, for they will never have the courage or motivation to produce for you and the team.

Good selling. ○

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