

Engineering Management
Field Project

Sandbaggers: A Guide for Understanding and Managing Underachievers

By

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Master of Science

The University of Kansas

Spring Semester, 2012

An EMGT Field Project report submitted to the Engineering Management Program
and the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the professors that I have had at the University of Kansas during my quest to obtain a masters degree. I would like to thank my employer for helping me financially with this degree through the tuition reimbursement program. I would like to thank my parents who have always encouraged me to never stop learning. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the members of my committee, Linda Miller, Max Rexroad, and Terry Sullivan, for their feedback and constructive criticism.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Managers never fire people. People fire themselves. As a manager what can be done when encountering a problem employee? When does one use techniques such as motivation and counseling and when is it time to let the employee go? The first step is being able to identify an underachiever. Through research and a series of interviews with individuals in managerial positions, methods were examined for identifying and evaluating an underachiever, and determining if poor performance is due to a lack of ability, poor training or just plain disinterest in the position. The interviews provided several solutions to solve the problem of an underachieving worker such as providing incentives, positive feedback and allowing your employees to feel their voice can be heard. The interviewees explained that although unfortunately some employees do have to be terminated sometimes, the better managers understand their employees' abilities and needs the better a chance they have of having happy productive employees as well as saving their companies time and money of rehiring new individuals.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Problem

Engineering companies across the world try to balance the scope, schedule and budget of every project. During the process of bidding on a project, management determines how many hours each task should take which allow the budget to be set. Firms must optimize their resources so that they can stay competitive with the thousands of other companies in the industry. This is done by having the right people in place for the job. Employees can make or break a project, because they have the ability to put a project behind schedule, kill a budget, or beat expected deadlines. When workers are not working to their capabilities, a company cannot achieve its optimal performance.

1.2 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to help managers better understand an underachiever. Oftentimes managers do not do a very good job of analyzing a low performing employee. This paper is intended to be used as a guide for knowing how to identify underachievers, assess the problem, and how to react to the employee. It is also intended to bring managers up to an even level for how to solve this issue. Readers will obtain knowledge of how to increase productivity of employees as well as what drives them to want to work harder.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast amount of literature dealing with workplace productivity. The following literature review summarizes various subject matters related to employee performance.

2.1 Sandbagging

- What is sandbagging? According to Gibson and Sachau (2000) sandbagging is defined as *“a self-presentational strategy involving the false claim or feigned demonstration of inability used to create artificially low expectations for the sandbagger’s performance.”*
- In the American Heritage Dictionary the definition of sandbagging is *“to downplay or misrepresent one’s ability in order to deceive someone.”*
- Princeton’s WordNet describes a sandbagger as *“someone who deceives you about his true nature or intent in order to take advantage of you.”*

2.2 The Cost of Employee Disengagement

According to Gallup, an international survey and consulting firm, 71% of American workers are not engaged or are actively disengaged on their jobs. With only a little under a third of people being engaged, this causes a huge problem for companies from a productivity standpoint. Gallup estimates that actively disengaged workers cost United States businesses over \$300 billion a year. The following chart shows the trend beginning in late 2010 and continuing into 2011. According to Gallup the chart was developed by consolidating various worker responses based on topics such as performance outcomes, productivity, customer service, and quality.

Gallup Employee Engagement Index

	Quarter 4 2010	Quarter 1 2011	Quarter 2 2011	Quarter 3 2011
% Engaged	28	30	30	29
% Not engaged	53	52	51	52
% Actively disengaged	19	18	19	19

GALLUP'

Furthermore, since the early 2000's Gallup has followed the trend among workers in the United States for engaged employees and discovered that it has been fairly consistent. In addition Gallup writes that the 2011 percentages of disengaged employees are comparable to the historical high of 20% that occurred in 2007 and 2008.

2.3 Demographics of Employee Disengagement

Gallup International states that in the United States workers that have gone to college are less likely to be engaged at work than those with just a high school diploma or GED. Furthermore, employees in the 30-64 age range are not as likely to be engaged at work as workers older or younger than them. The study found that workers over the age of 64 tend to be more engaged in their work than other ages. In addition, women have a tendency to be more engaged than men at work. Gallup's research found that there was not a correlation between salary and disengagement. The chart below shows the percentages of worker engagement based off demographics.

Percentage of Engaged Workers, by Demographics

	% Engaged
AGE	
18-29	32
30-44	28
45-64	28
65+	44
EDUCATION	
High school or less	34
Technical/Vocational/Some college	27
College graduate	28
Postgraduate work or degree	27
GENDER	
Male	27
Female	33
ANNUAL INCOME	
Less than \$36,000	30
\$36,000 to \$89,999	28
\$90,000+	30
Quarter 1-Quarter 3 2011	
GALLUP®	

2.4 Reasons for Underachievement

Sandbaggers are referred to as underachievers. Before a company can correctly act in response to an underachiever, the underlying cause of the problem must first be ascertained. Oftentimes people are too quick to assume that the employee is just lazy, but the cause could be a problem at home or an on the job issue. *“The cause of under-performance may be lack of talent or motivation, misfit into a job role, or purely*

personal problems” (Askari). When the source of the problem is not taken into account, management can end up making a rash decision. “If the employee has a history of good performance... those employees are worth keeping” (Baldoni).

When an employee seems to not care about his work, management should check further into the cause. Management needs to investigate to see if one of the following three things is happening, because there is a different solution for each (Kemp).

- The employee really does care about his job, but some concern or stress is hindering his performance.
- The team member may come from a different type of work atmosphere, where no one cared, and has not adapted to the expectations of the company.
- The employee is not interested in his job.

According to Gallup's Employee Engagement Study conducted in 2011, there are three key things that have an effect on employee engagement. The study suggests that disengagement is a direct result of poor leadership, purpose, and the absence of advancement opportunities described below.

- Trust in Management/ Poor Management:

When one does not trust the management of the company, he can become disengaged. Companies that do a poor job at organizational change have a much higher percentage of disengaged staff. Employees respond much better to leaders who do a good job of communicating

change. In addition, companies tend to have more engaged employees when their staff feels like they have a personal or emotional connection to management.

➤ Purpose, Meaning, or Connection to Organizational Vision:

Employees that feel like they do not do purposeful work are more likely to lack motivation to perform as well as they can on the job. When employees see how their work is benefiting the clientele, they become more enthusiastic about their work. It is important for management to clearly convey the company vision.

➤ Opportunities for Growth and Advancement:

When employees are not given the opportunities to further their career, then employee satisfaction decreases. Companies that allow career development and training see a higher level of productivity.

2.5 Improving Performance

Once a manager has determined the cause of sandbagging the improvement process can begin. When working with poor performers, the main goal is to improve productivity. According to Heller, the first step at improving productivity is to determine the factors responsible for the failure. If a person is lacking skills the company should put together a training session in order to bring the employee's skills up to speed. When an issue is small such as time-wasting, a verbal warning is often sufficient. Sometimes pairing the team member with another employee or coaching fixes the problem (Kemp). Heller states that *"there is usually a good reason why an employee is not performing well."* Shown below is Heller's table describing

causes and potential solutions to poor performance. Heller writes people often regret underachieving.

Dealing With Poor Performance	
Failure Factors	Remedial Action
Demotivation: Lacks motivation and energy to improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle the problem immediately. • Find out possible reasons for drop in motivation. • Base the improvement plan on a schedule of achievement.
Lack of Skills: Cannot cope with technical demands of the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out exactly which skills the employee is lacking. • Arrange training sessions as soon as possible. • Assign a person with more appropriate skills to the task.
Procrastination: Finds excuses for not getting on with work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break down the job into more manageable stages. • Do not let the procrastinator overestimate the time required. • If necessary, provide hands-on help to get the job started.
Absenteeism: Avoids work and dodges responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternly emphasize the negative effects of absenteeism. • Ensure that the employee feels an important part of the team. • Consider if more flexible hours would reduce the problem.
Habitual Lateness: Invariably late and always has an excuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let it be known that you are not interested in excuses. • Try a counseling approach before disciplining the employee. • See if peer pressure from other team members helps.
Personal Problems: Let personal worries affect work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on a person's performance, not their problems. • Consider giving sick leave or reassigning duties. • If necessary, advise the employee to seek professional help.

Performance reviews are not a new process for companies to use for evaluating employee performance, yet many managers still have trouble when giving a problem employee a review. According to a survey developed by Sibson Consulting and WorldatWork, over 70% of managers confessed to having a hard time giving performance evaluations to underachievers. *“There’s a fear of hurting the employee’s feelings or being perceived as mean”* (Sulkowicz).

Prior to a performance review one of three things should be done: coaching, mentoring, or counseling.

➤ Coaching

In many cases employees underperform because they do not have the tools or training to do the job. Managers should discuss the issues with the employee so the shortcomings are understood. Through the discussion a timetable should be set for improvement (Baltoni). *“The coaching process closes the gap between an individual’s or team’s present level of performance and the desired one (Heller). Heller explains that coaches help employees use more of their full potential through a six stage process which involves the following: Determine performance goals, understand the present position, explore options to achieve goals, establish when task will be completed, implement agreed actions, and lastly review progress.*

➤ Mentoring

Mentors are more experienced employees who help develop less experienced workers. Mentoring should be used continuously, and not only when the employee is not doing as well as the manager would like (Heller). The purpose of a mentor is to be a teacher, advisor, sponsor, and confidant (Cascio). Although mentoring can help promote the confidence and growth of an employee, “bad mentoring may be destructive and worse than no mentoring at all” (Cascio).

➤ Counseling:

When a company sees the need to counsel an employee, it is dealing with an employee that is having personal problems. Heller stresses to *“never turn away from a counseling need, and call in others if the problem is beyond your power.”*

The intention of counseling is to find a way to help the employee so that he or she will perform better.

2.6 Managing

Whatever the reason is for an employee’s subpar performance, the problem must be addressed because it will not fix itself. *“One reason under performers hang on is because their supervisors fear confrontation...ignoring the problem is not bliss, it’s stupidity, one that undermines the integrity of the organization”* (Baltoni). Every supervisor has a different approach to managing people. The management style can directly affect employee performance. No matter what kind of managing style one has, communication is vital. Conversing with employees allows management to be aware of the employee’s issues so that the problem can be better evaluated. In some

instances the employee may not know that there is an issue with his performance. People tend to rate themselves higher than other people actually rate them (London). The following are some strategies for managers to use when dealing with underperformers (Askari).

- Be proactive and recognize their responsibility for dealing with incidents of underperformance
- Ensure that all staff know exactly what is expected of them, with jointly set objectives that take into account each individual's capabilities within the performance management framework
- Adopt a developmental approach in dealing with underperformers
- Consult with staff who may be underperforming, recommending appropriate remedial action such as training
- Take developmental measures such as, mentoring and monitoring progress
- Create a working environment where underperformers are encouraged through training
- Utilize the employee assistance scheme where it is apparent that personal problems are a factor in underperformance

2.7 Motivation

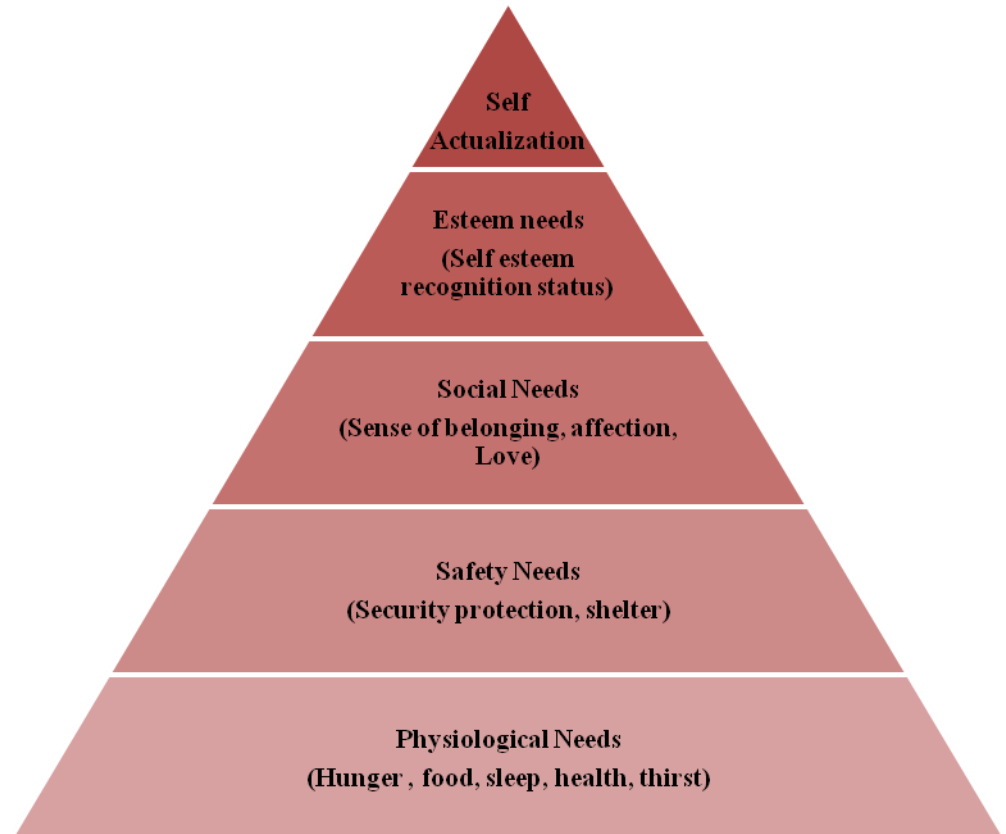
There have been many different theories developed over the years having to do with motivation. Although many of the theories developed on motivation contradict each other, there are still valuable ideas on what motivates an individual that can be useful.

Frederick Winslow Taylor believed that people were motivated by money. Taylor's theory suggested that people do not typically take pleasure in working; as a result, workers need to be closely controlled and supervised. He proposed that managers need to split production into smaller jobs. After work is split up into smaller jobs, employees must be trained properly and have access to acceptable equipment so that work can be performed as efficiently as possible on one fixed task. Employees are then paid based on the quality of task completed in a set time frame. Thus, employees will have the incentive to work as hard as possible.

Unlike Taylor, Elton Mayo's theory brought forth the idea that people are not motivated solely by money, but rather social needs are a better motivator at work. He wanted to prove to managers that employees should be treated as if they are valuable and to help them understand that employees like to work together. While in Chicago, Mayo performed several experiments at the Hawthorn factory in order to analyze productivity. For his experiment Mayo separated groups of workers and studied how each group reacted differently to working conditions such as lighting getting dimmer. When the test was complete he determined that productivity was not any different between the groups. After consulting with workers Mayo determined that people are motivated by the following:

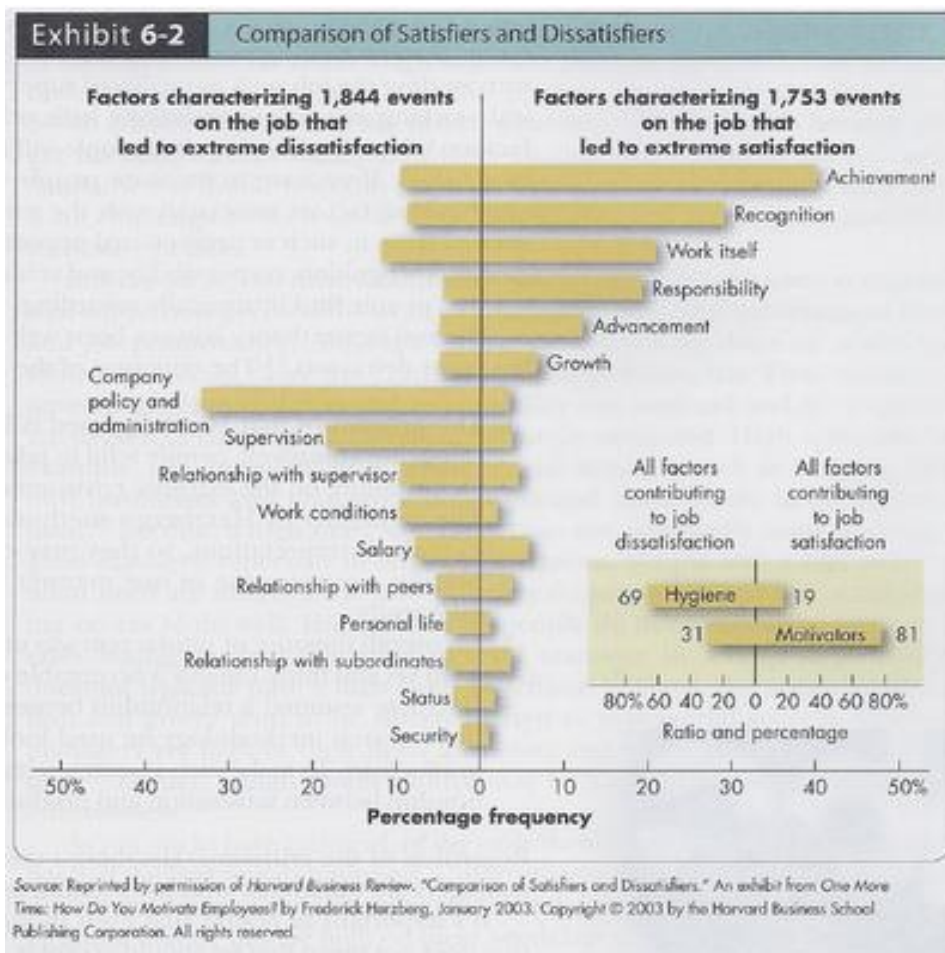
- Better communication in the workplace with managers and other employees
- Management being actively involved with employees
- Allowing workers to work in group settings

Abraham Maslow established the theory that there is a hierarchy of needs that humans need to have fulfilled to be content. According to Maslow the lower level of the pyramid must be satisfied before one will be motivated to move up to the next tier. One only will reach self actualization after all other needs are met.



Frederick Herzberg introduced another assumption of motivation in the workplace. Herzberg's theory proposed that hygiene factors and satisfiers impact motivation. He describes hygiene factors as such needs as salary, job security, work atmosphere, and quality of management. Hygiene factors do not necessarily motivate people, but they can cause people to become unhappy with their job if they are nonexistent.

Satisfiers are defined as things such as responsibilities, advancement opportunities, and accomplishments. According to Herzberg when an employee receives satisfiers, they are more likely to be motivated at work. When using Herzberg's theory managers must make sure that hygiene factors are given to employees before satisfiers are presented.



Clayton Alderfer offered yet another approach to thinking about motivation. The foundation of Alderfer's theory was developed from Maslow's hierarchy of needs where he consolidated Maslow's five-tier pyramid into three groups: existence, relatedness, and growth.

- Alderfer's first group "existence" is the want for physiological and material well-being, which is the combination of Maslow's first two levels on his pyramid (physiological and safety needs).
- The second group relatedness is one's need to satisfy personal relationships, which is comparable to the social needs stage on Maslow's model.
- Alderfer's group of growth is one's longing to continue to improve psychologically.

Alderfer's theory suggests that people are motivated to fulfill unsatisfied needs. Under his model once one acquires a lower level need it becomes less vital, but a high need can become more important once it becomes fulfilled. Higher priority needs can cause one to be less motivated when not obtained.

While a good manager tries to motivate his team members when needed, it can be even more beneficial to help employees motivate themselves. The following are seven things that can be done to help employees inspire themselves (Kemp).

- Define jobs clearly, with a starting and ending point
- Explain consequences of both success and failure for the company
- Provide incentives
- Remove roadblocks
- Praise small successes
- Let employees plan their own work and decide the best way to do it
- Give the team member a bigger task as he improves

3.0 PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with several different managers who each work at a different company and had at least fifteen years of management experience. All of the managers chosen work with white collar employees. The selected interviewers consisted of three men and two women, three of them from the Kansas City, Mo, one from Columbus, Ohio, and the final from St. Louis, MO. Open-ended questions were asked during the interview in order for the interviewee to expand upon his or her experiences. Each manager was asked to respond to seven questions that focused on managing an underachieving worker. Due to the busy schedules of the interviewees, all of the interviews conducted did not last more than thirty minutes on average. The overall focus of the interview was to determine how various companies solve the problem of underperforming employees. Interviews were used to get an understanding on how underperformance is handled in various organizations. The interviews were used to examine the following themes:

- Identifying an underachiever
- Causes of underachievement
- Assessing poor performance
- Relevance of feedback
- Improving productivity
- Handling an employee not qualified for a job
- Establishing work expectations

4.0 RESULTS

Identifying an Underachiever

Being able to identify an underachiever is crucial for every company. If the problem goes unnoticed or unaddressed, then there is a low probability that the behavior of the employee will change. The five interviewees were asked how they usually spot an underachieving worker. Through the interviews it was determined that an underachiever was easy to identify because he or she was an employee who consistently fell short in meeting the expectations of their job description. An underachiever identified his or her self by poor attendance, showing up to work late and leaving early, working slower than others with the same job title, or by subpar daily tasks. When a sandbagger is assigned to work on a specific project team or assign specific tasks with deadlines, he or she is often inconsistent with getting work done in a timely fashion. As a result of the employee's poor work performance, there will be frequent negative comments from team members and clients about them. One manager stressed that when weekly status reports are performed management can get a good idea of the productivity of the employees and more accurately evaluate performance and the level of effort being put forth.

Evaluating an Underachiever

Based on the responses from the interviewees, there are numerous reasons that employees sandbag. The main reasons for lack of workplace performance are the following:

Employees Unfit for the Job: In some instances the employee does not have either the mental and/or physical ability to perform the job requirements. When a company places this type of employee in a position, no matter how hard he or she tries to do the job it will not be efficient. Since the company is not capitalizing on their skill set, the work performance will appear as if the employee is sandbagging even if he or she is actually trying. As a result the employee may be looked at as lazy or slow.

Outside influences: The employee has something going on at home which is distracting him or her and keeping him or her from performing to full potential.

Given unclear instruction: A manager needs to lay out clear expectations as to what acceptable job performance is and the consequences of not meeting those expectations. It is important for management to be clear in instruction so that there is not a disconnection with the work of what the employee is supposed to produce and what the employee actually produces.

Employees do not like their jobs: In some instances employees sandbag because they do not like their jobs and do not have the desire to be there. These types of employees tend to only come to work for the paycheck. They do not have the drive to become better at their job. One of the individuals interviewed stated that frequently this issue occurs when one believes the work that he or she does is not

appreciated or meaningless. A few of the interviewees explained that when companies have employees that do not like their jobs, in many instances their attitudes will be negative, and oftentimes they will not have much desire to be team players.

Lack of Resources: All of the interviewees concurred that occasional the problem of underachievement is found to be a lack of resources. When an employee has outdated equipment or does not have the correct equipment he or she will not perform as well as expected.

Determining the Cause of Poor Performance

One manager stated that the key to determining the cause of underachievement is to get to know the employees. He stated that a manager does not have to be really close friends with the staff but it is important to get to know about them. Other interviewees agreed that getting to know the employees allows one to get a better understanding of what the team member is capable of doing. For example, if a manager gets a new employee and finds out that every other manager has had problems getting the individual to perform, then it becomes apparent that the individual is lazy or unmotivated. If one gets a new employee and the person is trying hard, but does not seem to catch on, then there are some training issues. Training needs should be addressed by sitting down with the employee and his or her trainer to identify the training needs. A one-on-one meeting, peer reviews, and performance reviews with the employee will usually identify the root cause of the poor performance and provide a more accurate assessment of the employee. A time should be set up for the training and a follow-up at a mutually agreed upon date to

see how he or she is doing. If one has an employee that has been coached and still cannot seem to do the job even though he or she tries, then there is an ability issue.

Motivation:

Several of the interviewees suggested that when addressing a motivation issue a manager should lay out his or her expectations and make sure the employee understands those expectations. If he or she does not meet those expectations, the manager should document the discussion and hold the employee accountable. All of the managers agreed that one can never have too much documentation on problem behavior. One interviewee explained that employees will either leave the work group voluntarily or involuntarily, or will shape up and do the job as expected. The key is laying out the expectations and holding employees accountable.

Many suggestions for dealing with motivation issues were made during the interviews. Fixing a motivation issue is not always challenging; sometimes it is as simple as saying “thank you for the effort” or “job well done.” On occasion motivation can be improved with monetary incentives, rewards and recognition, time off, or improved working conditions. Many of the interviewees stated that one’s attitude and potential determines the level of effort put forth in investing in this item. When one has a poor attitude it becomes exceedingly difficult to address the issues of motivation.

Knowledge:

The interviewees stressed that people learn at different rates; as a result it is important for management to give the employee adequate time to become proficient. A reasonable time expectation for the person to learn the job should be

set. For instance, if it normally takes six months to learn a job and an individual takes seven months, that is not an issue. However, if one is still training a person a year later for a job that should have taken six months, then there is either ability or a motivation issue. Several interviewees agreed that a lack of knowledge can be overcome through additional training, mentoring opportunities, and educational exposure provided by the job or through the local colleges. Management can minimize a knowledge issue by doing frequent follow ups, documenting discussions, and providing adequate training and feedback.

Lack of Ability:

Unfortunately, some people try to do jobs which they do not have the physical stamina or mental capabilities for, and they struggle. One manager declared that oftentimes employees demonstrating a lack of ability are nice people, but the bottom line is that companies are in business to make money and employ competent people not carry “nice people” in mismatched jobs. When faced with this problem several managers agreed that one has to have discussions with that individual, lay out the expectations, and let them know where he or she is falling short. Always talk about the behavior and not the individual. Make sure that documentation is kept. In addition, the interviewees explained that the employee should be encouraged to express any concerns and how management can help them. If the problem is a lack of ability a manager can look for other assignments for the person that he or she could successfully perform.

Handling Employees that are not cut out for the Job

Occasionally a company will encounter an employee that does not merge well with the company. When it is apparent to a manager that the employee cannot adapt to the company procedures and cannot handle the work assigned to them, then a change must be made. One manager stated that in many circumstances the individual will either voluntarily leave the workgroup, or the manager will have enough documentation to have the person terminated for job performance. He stated that there are two key things to remember. (1) Managers never fire people. People fire themselves. They either meet your expectations or they must find another job whose expectations they can meet. (2) A decision does not have to be comfortable to be right. Other managers added that as a manager one is paid to increase shareholder values not coddle unmotivated or incompetent workers.

Dealing with workers who do not seem to work with the company can be a very controversial issue in management. One manager stated that there are definitely two schools of thought. He emphasized that his role is to have competent capable people in his workgroup and in the company. Through his experience knowledgeable employees tend to perform better in groups within the company. As a result he stated that it is important to coach employees and provide them with the necessary tools to perform their expected task. Other interviews agreed that when the employee is able to improve performance it is much better for the company and for them if he later transfer out of the manager's workgroup. All of the interviewees suggested that the first step to addressing this issue is to determine the skill set of the employee, and if there are not any behavioral issues that would prevent further

employment with the company. After their skill set is gauged seek to move them to a job that fits their ability if available. The key to transferring an employee to a different department is to compare the job requirement to the employee's skills. In addition, the person should have a good attitude, attendance, and willingness to improve in order to consider them for a transfer. If this person is able to voluntarily transfer before he or she improves, give the new manager a heads up. On the contrary if one gets someone's problem from another workgroup, meet with the individual immediately. It is good to keep an open mind, but the expectation should be explained clearly. Furthermore, when acquiring another manager's problem employee, take up where the previous manager left off in terms of performance management with this individual. A manager should not ever knowingly transfer an incompetent employee to a different department within the company. It sends the message to the employee that if he or she slacks off the only repercussions will be getting transferred. It is the manager's responsibility to address the issue and hold the problem employee accountable, or the employee will continue to do subpar work. Even if the employee is able to voluntarily transfer, he should realize that if he exhibits certain behaviors, he may not be so fortunate and be able to transfer out. All of the interviewees agreed that because of the initial investment in the employee, the time delay of finding a new hire, and the cost of hiring someone new, firing should be a last resort. When the employee does not have the skill to perform his or her job or is not interested in doing the work, then relocating the staff member would be bad for the company and he or she ultimately should be let go.

Importance of Feedback

Feedback alone rarely fixes poor performance. Feedback is often only the start. By providing feedback to the person, a manager is defining expectations. When providing feedback, the manager should explain the benefits of performance improvement and consequences if the problem is not corrected. Meeting with an employee, discussing his or her shortcomings, laying out expectations, putting together a performance improvement plan, and a timeline for meeting this plan fixes poor performance. The frequency of feedback is based on the individual situations and the goals that have been set. In some instances, feedback should be received weekly. A manager should not wait until the end of the year to give someone feedback on how they performed for the last twelve months. Each of the managers interviewed concurred that managers should tell employees not only negative things to improve on, but the positive things they are doing, too.

Improving Productivity of Employees

Some of the interviewees stated that workplace productivity can be improved through training, employee incentives, and thorough communication. Others stated that disciplinary actions such as written warning, second written warning, three day suspension, thirty-day suspension, and indefinite suspension can be used to improve productivity. One manager stated that his company does not necessarily do anything to improve productivity, but it is typically the responsibility of the individual managers. Most of the interviewees indicated that there are some tools available that a manager can use, one of which is a performance improvement plan (PIP). This plan is designed to target items and dates that the person must

meet, and if not met the person can be terminated. Managers can look for process improvement opportunities that can assist the person in being more productive. Another option could be to offer incentives to meet certain goals. Allowing staff to participate in the process of improvement gives the employee the opportunity to have his or her ideas heard.

Showing Employee the Level Work Expected

According to the interviewees there are several things a company can do to demonstrate to employees the level of work expected from their staff. Several managers agreed that employee performance is a direct relationship with team communication. One manager stated that communication tends to be the biggest complaint among employees when working on projects. When working on a project with multiple people everyone depends on each other. If one team member is slow about getting his work done, then it can hold up other people and tasks. In order to minimize project delays management should give clear directions, making sure employees understand what they are expected to do. It is important to be firm but fair with all of the employees. Employees should be held accountable for those tasks. Positive feedback should be given when an employee meets or exceeds expectations in order to show that his work is valued. Constructive feedback should be given when management sees areas that can be improved upon. Negative feedback should be followed up by counseling or coaching to ensure that the employee understands the level of work that is required. In addition management should consider rewarding good employees by merit raises and other perks as allowed. Several of the interviewees stated that job descriptions, performance plans and goals are the

methods used. From a project perspective the project manager should have a plan that clearly defines the assignments and task. One of the interviewees stated that when an employee is willing to put forth effort and is trying to perform quality work, then management tends to be more likely to help that employee succeed. She stated that if an employee must be micromanaged on a regular basis, then there is a problem.

5.0 SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

In conclusion there are many factors as a manager to consider when coming across underachievers in the workplace. First an underachiever must be identified. As aforementioned there are traits associated with underachievers such as consistently falling short of the job expected of them. The underachiever also must be evaluated. There should not be the automatic assumption that the employee is lazy. The manager should take some time to observe if there may be underlying issues causing this employee to underperform. The employee could possibly just not be a good fit for the job being asked, or there could be some underlying personal issues.

Subpar employee performance must be addressed. The problem will never fix itself. There is a fear of confrontation and sometimes a fear of hurting employee's feelings. This will not solve anything. Sometimes the employee is not even aware their performance has been below standard. Employees have to receive proper training in order to do a good job at the work expected of them. If there is an issue with training it also should be addressed to avoid future issues. Employees must have a clear idea of what is expected of them and what will not be tolerated. Factors that can help motivate employees include good communication, management being actively involved with the employee as well as allowing workers to work in group settings.

When handling an employee that is not a good fit for the job, a manager should consider if the worker's skills may better be utilized elsewhere in the company. If they are a good employee but just not necessarily a good fit for the job

being asked, the manager could look into transferring him or her. Ultimately, however, a manager has to remember that his job is to increase the value of the company. If the employee cannot do that, even if it is not necessarily a “comfortable” situation, the manager has to be prepared to let the person go.

When dealing with underachievers one of the managers interviewed said, “Get to know your employees.” The more actively involved a manager is with his employees, the better he can determine who indeed is just an underachiever and who can be helped by other means.

Final Thoughts:

Based off the interviews and literature there are several factors that cause sandbagging. Many of the solutions found in the literature review lined up with the information obtained in the interviews. One issue that was discovered through the literature review was the fact that workers become disengaged due to management. Each of the managers interviewed had a solution for determining the cause of the underachievement and a suggested solution to fixing the problem as shown in the table below, but there was not any mention on how to fix the problem caused through management. The interviews suggested that companies have training and mentoring opportunities in place for staff, but not a training program to teach management how to effectively communicate with employees so that they are receptive and enthusiastic about their work. A key component of employee productivity is communication. As a result companies should consider implementing a training program for managers to educate them on how to

communicate with people so that they respond positively. This type of program would help companies have a higher number of effective leaders.

PERFORMANACE MANAGEMENT	
<p>Willing to do the job and can do the job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provide feedback to the employee ➤ Possible incentive for this employee depending on the level of work produced 	<p>Won't do the job, but knows how to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make sure expectations are clearly understood ➤ Verbally counsel the employee to find out the reason the employee is not performing ➤ Written warning and/or suspension ➤ Terminate the employee if productivity doesn't improve
<p>Will do the job but doesn't know how</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make sure expectations are clearly understood ➤ Begin by coaching and encouraging this employee ➤ Provide mentor and training opportunities to the employee 	<p>Won't do the job, and won't try to learn how</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Employee should be terminated

6.0 SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL WORK

Due to time restrictions several questions from the research did not get addressed.

Further investigation can be used to take on the following:

- All of the information from the literature review and from the interview focused on how the underachievement is handled in the United States. Additional study could be done to compare how other countries handle the problem.
- All of the managers interviewed work in white collar jobs. Further research can be done to see if there is a difference between blue collar and white collar jobs, and to find out if it is more likely in one versus the other.
- Through research it became apparent that in some instances employees appear to underperform because there is a misunderstanding between them and management. Managers tend to have different management styles. As a result an individual could investigate if a micromanaging manager has the same level of performance issues as a hands off manager.
- Another option that could be done is to develop a new type of coaching program that is directed towards teaching managers how to coach effectively.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions:

- What do you typically do to identify an underachiever?
- What are the reasons you have seen for an employee not working up to their capabilities?
- How do you determine if an employee's poor performance is due to lack of motivation, knowledge, or lack of ability?
- Does feedback ever seem to fix a poor performance issue? If so how often should an employee receive feedback?
- What does your company do to improve productivity of employees?
- When you determine that an employee is not cut out for a job, is it better to fire them or move them into a different position? Why?
- What does the company do to show the employee what level of work is expected of him?