

A close-up photograph of two hands in business suits. The hand on the left is giving a thumbs-up gesture, while the hand on the right is giving a thumbs-down gesture. The background is dark, making the hands stand out.

HOW TO MANAGE HIGH & LOW PERFORMERS

PEOPLE WHO INVEST THEIR MONEY wisely focus on the investments that have the greatest chance of turning out to be winners. Do you do the same when managing the performance of your employees? If you are sadly like most managers, the answer is you probably get caught up spending too much time with low performers who have a fair chance of being acceptable but not stars. What would happen if you dedicated more time to your employees who are acceptable performers yet exhibit clear signs of being high performers? The

answer is that many of these acceptable performers will move into the ranks of high performers.

As a CEO, manager, or business owner, how do you identify the employees to focus on, and how can you make the most of your lower performers?

1. Be selective about whom you focus on

Carefully select who will be important for you to invest your time, energy, and other resources

in to develop their performance. This decision is incredibly important. If you choose a low performer, your likely payoff will be less than if you select a high performer. This may seem at odds with what you have learned in the past, or it may even seem to go against the grain of democracy or fighting for the underdog. However, if your goal is to maximize performance, then this approach is more likely to yield greater results more quickly.

Anyone can really improve only two or three things at a single time, no matter what

DEDICATE MOST OF YOUR TIME AND ENERGY TO THE PERFORMERS WITH THE GREATEST PAYOFF.

multitaskers tell you. Deliberately practising two or three things is what drives high impact gains in performance and productivity, and that practice can be enhanced with explicit, targeted feedback from managers. It is far easier, more rewarding, and more effective to leverage strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses. The key is to find a strength in one area in the performer and get them to use that strength in an area that requires improvement. Real, sustained improvement takes time. As a manager, you require patience as you need to focus on the long term and not just the quick fix. The quicker the fix, the less sustainable the result.

2. Keep hope alive for all performers

Keep hope alive for all performers, even those who are chronically low. What does this mean? As a manager or CEO, you want to make investments, though not equal investments, in all performers. But do not waste a lot of time, energy, and other resources on your employees who, at their very best, will only be average or acceptable performers. These are not bad people or bad fits for your company or not worthy of their salary or slackers; they may simply be comfortable in their current position and have no desire to become the company superstar.

A manager who wants to improve performance should demonstrate what psychologists call “unconditional positive regard”. This means that you accept where your staff begins their performance improvement journey. Some may begin behind; others at the right place; and some even ahead. Assess the starting place but do not judge. Then, you can

identify the signature strengths of all of your staff, even chronic low performers.

Watch out for the “Pygmalion effect” of your staff rising or falling to meet your expectations. In other words, if you have low expectations, they will move to meet your low expectations; if you have high expectations, your employees will move to meet your high expectations.

Focus on making progress toward a longer-term goal and reward that progress, even if it is only one baby step after another. By rewarding small steps towards the larger performance goal, you will also feel less frustration because you know your efforts with the low performers are paying off.

3. Address chronic low performers

Cut your losses early. As a manager or CEO, you are responsible to your boss or stockholders, to your company, and to your customers. There are two ways to address chronic low performers. If, after setting clear expectations, monitoring their performance, giving feedback about their performance, coaching them, and then letting them know about the consequences of underperforming, you still see no improvement, you should let them go.

If your company cannot afford to let any employees go to keep the operation running, the second way to address the issue is to reassign chronic low performers. When you reassign an employee, you protect the majority of those who are performing well from a smaller group that could persuade them to lower performance across the board or distract the higher performers.

Picture yourself three to six months from now after experimenting with these three recommendations. Not only will you have a plan for all performers, but you will have dedicated more time, energy, and resources to those performers with the greatest payoff. Your time is precious; you can focus on only so much. You have to be selective about what you focus on. When you are responsible for managing performance, prioritize and be confident knowing that your investment will pay off for you, your company, and your customers.

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Reprinted with the permission of Dr. Marty Martin, known for presenting state-of-the-art content in an engaging dynamic fashion. He has been speaking and training nationally and internationally for over 30 years. He is the author of *Taming Disruptive Behavior* (The American College of Physician Executives) and Director of the Health Sector Management MBA Concentration and Associate Professor in the College of Commerce at DePaul University in Chicago, USA, and practices at Aequus Wealth Management. For more information, visit www.dmartymartin.com.

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