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For twenty-seven years, the Executive Edge has been a value added service to support our employers and candidates in their Personal & Professional Development.



Bringing Out the Best in Your People

By **Joe Hunt**

Great managers sincerely want their people to achieve excellence at work. Executives tell me this every day, yet they all struggle to know how to bring out the best in people. Leadership and management alike know they can't achieve expected business results without the full engagement of individuals and teams.

But many leaders are baffled about how to truly engage their people for peak performance. What I see is that many of these managers and leaders are stuck in outmoded motivational incentives that don't work.

Peak performance is the result of bringing out the best in people, and is defined as a combination of excellence, consistency, creativity and ongoing improvement.

To achieve peak performance, one must ensure employees find the right job, tasks and conditions that match their strengths. Facilitating the right fit becomes one of management's most crucial responsibilities. While every employee has the potential to deliver peak performance, it's up to the manager to find ways to make it happen.

Disengaged Or Bored?

If leaders don't motivate people for peak performance, companies won't meet their projected goals, won't innovate, won't retain customers and most likely will go out of business.

Disengaged employees often appear to lack commitment. In reality, many of them crave engagement. No one enjoys working without passion or joy.



While many factors cause disengagement, the most prevalent is feeling overwhelmed (or, conversely, underwhelmed). Disconnection and overload pose obstacles to performance, yet they often go undetected or ignored because neither qualifies as a disciplinary issue.

Meanwhile, managers try to work around such problems, hoping for a miraculous turnaround or a spark that reignites energy and drive. They try incentives, empowerment programs or the management “fad du jour.”

While it’s impossible to create “flow” moments all day long, any manager can greatly improve on the ability to help people achieve peak performance. Traditionally managers try various motivational methods, such as incentives and rewards, but with only temporary success.

Use Brain Science to Bring Out the Best

As far back as a 2005 Harris poll, 33 percent of 7,718 employees surveyed believed they had reached a dead end in their jobs, and 21 percent were eager to change careers. Only 20 percent felt passionate about their work.

The situation isn't improving. In 2014, 52.3 percent of Americans said they were unhappy at work, according to a report by the Conference Board, the New York-based nonprofit research group.

When so many skilled and motivated people spend decades moving from one job to the next, something is wrong. They clearly have not landed in the right outlets for their talents and strengths. Their brains never light up.

The better the fit, the better the performance. People require clear roles that allow them to succeed, while also providing room to learn, grow and be challenged.

5 Steps to Boost Performance

Dr. Edward M. Hallowell, author of *Shine: Using Brain Science to Get the Best from Your People* (Harvard Business Press), synthesizes some of the research into five steps managers can apply to maximize employees’ performance.

Dr. Hallowell refers to the five cited essential ingredients as “The Cycle of Excellence,” which works because it exploits the powerful interaction between an individual’s intrinsic capabilities and extrinsic environment. A psychiatrist and ADD expert, he draws on brain science and peak performance research for bringing out the best in people:

1. **Select:** Put the right people in the right job, and give them responsibilities that “light up” their brains.
2. **Connect:** Strengthen interpersonal bonds among team members.
3. **Play:** Help others unleash their imaginations at work.
4. **Grapple and Grow:** When the pressure’s on, enable employees to achieve mastery of their work.
5. **Shine:** Use the right rewards to promote loyalty and stoke your people’s desire to excel.

Step 1: Select

To match the right person to the right job, examine how three key questions intersect:

1. At what tasks or jobs does this person excel?
2. What does he/she like to do?
3. How does he/she add value to the organization?

Set the stage for your employees to do well with responsibilities they enjoy. You can then determine how they will add the greatest possible value to your organization.

Step 2: Connect

Managers and employees require a mutual atmosphere of trust, optimism, openness, transparency, creativity and positive energy.

A positive working environment starts with how the boss handles negativity, failure and problems. The boss sets the tone and models preferred behaviors and reactions. Employees take their cues from those who lead them.



To encourage connection:

- Look for the spark of brilliance within everyone.
- Encourage a learning mindset.
- Model and teach optimism.
- Learn about each person.
- Treat everyone with respect, especially those you dislike.
- Meet people where they are; most will do their best with what they have.
- Seek out the quiet ones, and try to bring them in.

This is common sense, but we fail to use it when it is really required. When people are floundering, the last thing they need is to have their flaws and mistakes spotlighted. Instead, make sure you understand where they are at and what the real problems are.

Step 3: Play

Play isn't limited to break time. Any activity that involves the imagination lights up our brains and produces creative thoughts and ideas. Play and a playful attitude boost morale, reduce fatigue and bring joy to workdays.

Encourage imaginative thinking with these steps:

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Encourage everyone to produce three new ideas each month.
- Allow for irreverence or goofiness (without disrespect).
- Brainstorm.
- Reward new ideas and innovations.
- Encourage people to question everything.

Step 4: Grapple and Grow

Help people engage imaginatively with tasks they like and at which they excel. Encourage them to stretch beyond their usual limits. If tasks are too easy, people fall into boredom and routine without making any progress or learning anything new.

The job of a manager is to be a catalyst when people get stuck, offering suggestions but letting them work out solutions.

Step 5: Shine

Every employee should feel recognized and valued for what he or she does. Recognition should not be reserved solely for a group's stars.



When a person is underperforming, consider that lack of recognition may be a cause. An employee usually won't come right out and tell you that he/she feels undervalued, so you must look for the subtle signs. In addition:

- Be on the lookout for moments when you can catch someone doing something right. It doesn't have to be unusual or spectacular. Don't withhold compliments.
- Be generous with praise. People will pick up on your use of praise and start to perform for themselves and each other.
- Recognize attitudes, as well as achievements. Optimism and a growth mindset are two attitudes you can single out and encourage. Look for others.

When you're in sync with your people, you create positive energy and opportunities for peak performance. Working together can be one of life's greatest joys—and it's what we're wired to do.

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