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On a Shooting Spree

Indispensable is a word that needs to be used cautiously and sparingly. The reason is the obvious: nothing is actually indispensable. Everything has a substitute, be it an object or a person.

Today most managers, especially in the IT industry, are striving to keep their businesses afloat in the least expensive way. This calls for building credibility in their software implementation projects. Therefore, the only factor that can build or destroy credibility is the creator and implementer of the software – the “*man*” himself. Therefore, when sought for advice, e-Market consultants give the “*fire*” command. As ruthless as it may sound, the solution is to nip the problem in the bud. They believe that the most cost effective and inexpensive way of boosting the efficiency of a new application, software or an up gradation process is to identify the person and fire him.

Firing the problem child serves two purposes. First, it eliminates the problem and second it prevents others from following suit. Moreover, it drives others to perform better. It also conveys a message of professionalism and equality. Therefore, for a manager who desires to educate employees about the values that the organization upholds and also wants to demonstrate workplace professionalism, firing the right guy is prudence. Sounds like a cruel and ruthless proposition – however, in soul it’s pure pragmatism. Professionalism has little room for pity and sympathy. The rules of pragmatism are rather clear. Preserve the “*wine*” and throw the rest. The longer wine is brewed the better. The residue, though edible, needs to be discarded.

Most managers are aware of the real problem and don’t seek expert advice. They would have identified the troubling person, but they shy away from publicly acknowledging their views. The fear of being admonished, sued or even laughed at keeps them mum. Further, they shield their indecision under covers of justification like, he is the best programmer, she is boss’ favorite, he has been the best performer etc. When one starts with the intent of finding good reasons he will find plenty. However, managers need to decide if the reasons are worthwhile and if they outweigh the damage caused by that one person? Most definitely, the answer would be a “no”.

IT managers would be the last to lose out on good people. The era of lay-offs and retrenchments that followed with the burst of the dotcom bubble has robbed many an IT company of its best talent. This is a major cause for the apprehensive attitude of IT managers contemplating on firing a good performer.

Mr./Ms. Indispensable

IT managers face a common problem. Their best guys are usually the problem creators. For instance, Mike, a senior IT manager at an internet-based company, had major discipline problems with one the company’s best performers. Unfortunately for Schwab, he was on the same project that Charles was leading. Charles was into coding and programming. His work was flawless. However, his behavior was intolerable. Charles



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often criticized people openly, called them names, laughed at their failures and behaved in the most arrogant manner. He was undoubtedly the most well paid engineer in the industry and that seemed to take him on frequent ego trips. That the top officials praised Charles ever so often compounded the problem. However, eventually, he was fired.

The dismissal sure took its toll on work quality and productivity. The team had to revive and rejuvenate from the wrath of Charles' yearlong dominance. It took time but it did happen. The morale was suddenly high, productivity levels shot up and it was no more a one-man show. Technical issues were solved amicably without spite and aggression.

Another bit of advice that consultants often offer is "*hire slow and fire fast*". It's important for companies to indulge in a well-thought hiring process rather than just rushing through it. Similarly, when it comes to firing, managers must take quick decisions. Most managers get an inkling of the commitment levels of individuals. If one is sure that a particular individual is not even going to try, leave alone implement the project, then there is little sense in waiting for a "right" time. It's best to fire such people at the earliest before their incompetence becomes infectious.

The bottom line

The bottom line of any business, technical or non-technical, is high productivity. True, but at what cost? Organizations ought not to turn a blind eye to the misgivings of talented employees in the name of productivity. It's important to convey that misbehavior would not be tolerated a person's talent or productivity record notwithstanding. Giving talented workers a leeway to work outside the rulebook can be greatly demoralizing for in the rest of the team. Ignoring bad behavior would harm organizational discipline and eventually overall productivity.

Therefore, managers need to muster courage and integrity to take bold decisions even if it means a compromise on productivity.