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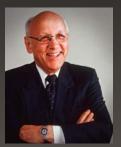# Are We Managers Crazy?

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Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?

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We would never ask a midget to try out for an NBA basketball team nor ask the heaviest person on our team to slip into a small crevice during a cave exploration – yet this is what we do every day with our staff in our office.

Imagine for a moment that you have a team of people around you of varying capabilities and various looks and sizes. Allow us, in this imagination, to focus on four of these team members. The first, "Long John", is nearly 7 feet tall. The second, "Petite Penelope" is a wisp of a thing at 4 feet 10" in height. The third, Heavy Harry, tips the scales at nearly 300 pounds, while the fourth of this particular group, "Anorexic Annie" has yet to visit 100 pounds in weight this far in her brief lifetime. But let us say that these are the people you have, for a whole host of different circumstances – part of your assembled team.

First let us observe how they look to you and to each other. Long John is obviously tall to everyone, Petite Penelope decidedly short, Heavy Harry clearly of large construction and Anorexic Annie, quite thin. Besides different physical traits of each of these extremes, in all likelihood, each has a unique view of the world. The tall man's view of the world is quite different than the small lady's. All of this is very obvious, isn't it?

The second point to note is that we managers would direct our physical task assignments or non-assignments to these team members according to their structures. We might ask Long John to reach onto the 10th shelf of the book rack to retrieve a book for us and we might even joke about it. "John you can reach that book far better than me. Is that OK for you to stretch yourself to get it?" We would not ask Petite Penelope. But we might ask her to reach to a 2-foot level that we are uncomfortable bending to: "Penelope, you are built closer to that shelf level than I am. Do you mind?" Likewise we probably wouldn't encourage Petite Penelope to try out for the company basketball team, but we might certainly enquire if Long John was interested in approaching this sport for the company. Let us say to reach a certain document we can only do so by accessing it from a flimsy table. The odds are you would not ask Heavy Harry to do this task, but you probably could suggest it to Anorexic Annie. With Annie on it, the table will survive and you will get the needed book. In this same room we have some very tiny, maze-like aisles of bookshelves. Who will we ask to slip between them to retrieve the special volume that we seek? Would you even consider Heavy Harry for this task? Would you think: "It is good for Heavy Harry to learn how to slip into small spot – it will make him a well-rounded person". I think not – not even for a second. "Where is Anorexic Annie? I know she can slip through that tiny corner part."

In this scenario, each person knows why you are asking them or the others and no one is offended. It seems natural to make the requests you do and would be quite unnatural to do otherwise.

Yet, when it comes to the known structure of people's minds, we seem to abandon the logical approach of assigning people to task they can naturally and obviously assume and steer them to those that are not natural to their structure – and hence uncomfortable with. When we are cognizant of people's mental structure we can direct them to task that work for them and avoid those that don't. I call this assignment, aligning a person with the natural strengths of their mind. This becomes a way of having people work in at their own comfort zones. When they do, they build on their obvious strengths and stay away from their obvious weaknesses. The result: they start to excel. Their jobs become a thrill instead of a struggle.

At our company we draw on the approach of Hippocrates of 350 B.C. who created four behavioural traits to help identify people's mental zones. We all have some of these four traits but usually we are strong in two and weak in the converse pair. Since we do not have the space to delve into these mental structures here, let us leave you with an example. Imagine Joanne who is a creative person, full of ideas, willing to innovate and take chances. She is not so well organized, hates fussy details and likes variety in her work. We would call Joanne a "Visionary".

It is Joanne's misfortune that her boss, Sam, is an "Analyzer" which means he is good at detailed tasks, is careful, cautious, avoids risk-taking, logical, organized and believes in following rules and procedures to the letter – the very opposite to Joan. Here is the crazy part: being totally insensitive to Joanne's different characteristics, he hands her assignments that he thinks are easy for anyone to master. That is, just as the tall person's view of the world differs from the short person's view, so the "Analyzer's" view differs from the "Visionary's". So Sam expects Joanne to get all the details right, have things properly ordered and not venture off in new directions. But Joanne is not comfortable with fussy detail and while she is disciplined enough to get things right, her idea of a dream job is not doing numbers all day long. As well, her new suggestions are ignored: "Just follow the procedures; we have always done things that way", says Sam. Not only does Joanne feel underutilized, she is. Her power lies in creative thinking and the risk-taking that comes with new ideas. Stifled, Joanne is never able to find a "thrill" in her job and starts to search for another. What Sam should do is to think: "Joanne is different than me. I will draw on her strengths, the very things I lack – her ideas, her willingness to stick her neck out, and her view of the grand picture. I, in turn, will concentrate on my natural skills; preciseness and attention to details." You should spend time assessing the natural talents, skills or dispositions of people in your employ. (You should also look more closely where there is poor job fit and take steps to realign people to positions where they will be more comfortable.)

Conclusion: The Analyzer's predictable behaviour (fear of chaos) is as natural and as obvious as the tall person's long reach. You should create an environment where everyone feels free to share these personality traits so that everyone is knowledgeable of who is 'tall' and who is 'short'. You should assign tasks that draw on people's natural skills and avoid 'forcing' people to act as who they are not. Watch job happiness go up, productivity climb, staff turnover drop, and hence profits increase. THE IDENTIFICATION OF NATURAL TRAITS SHOULD BE THE STARTING POINT OF EVERYBODY'S JOB IN YOUR BUSINESS. It is simply working against nature to not do so.

Since misalignment by managers against personality traits is so prevalent in business, it makes me wonder if we managers are crazy.

Good luck

W. Caswell