

Solutions

"The problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

Albert Einstein

Online Performance Strategies for Managers and Supervisors from the Division of Personnel

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Quick Tip:

From the editors of *Solutions*

Don't get tied down in bureaucratic red tape. The difference between influential leaders and managers is that leaders do not set restrictions on themselves. There is enough red tape and other people's priorities trying to restrict what you can do. Focus on what you can influence!

"The major job was getting everyone to understand and believe that they had something within their personal power to contribute – something that no one else could contribute."

-Ella Baker

[Click here](#) for previous issues of *Solutions*?

FEATURE ARTICLE

Technical Knowledge

Diploma Mills

Spotting questionable credentials on a resume or application

According to online encyclopedia Wikipedia.com, a diploma mill (also known as a degree mill) is an organization that awards academic degrees and diplomas with substandard or no academic study and without recognition by official educational accrediting bodies. Individuals who buy from "diploma mills" can claim to hold an academic degree – while the "mill" makes a nice profit. These degrees are often awarded based on vaguely construed life experience. Some such organizations claim accreditation by non-recognized and unapproved accrediting bodies set-up solely for the purposes of providing a veneer of authenticity.

Experts say clues will help you spot questionable credentials on a resume or application. Bill Leonard, a senior writer for *HR Magazine*, tells us what to look out for:

Out-of-sequence degrees

Traditional degrees take a traditional progression – high school, followed by bachelor's, masters, and doctoral or other advanced degrees. Consider it a red flag if an applicant claims a master's or doctoral degree, but no bachelor's degree – or a college degree, but no high school or equivalency diploma.

Quickie degrees. It usually takes time to earn a degree – three to four years for an undergraduate degree; one or two years for a master's degree, and even longer to earn a doctorate. A degree earned in a short time, or several degrees listed for the same year, are warning signs.

Degrees from schools other than the applicant's work or home location.

If an applicant worked full time while attending school, check the locations of the job and the educational institution. If the applicant didn't live where he went to school, check to see if the degree is from an accredited distance-learning institution. If the degree is not from this type of institution, it may be from a diploma mill.

Sound-alike names. Some diploma mills use names that sound or look like those of well-known colleges or universities. If the institution has a name similar to a well-known school located in a different state, check the school's credentials. Look for degrees from institutions with prestigious-sounding foreign names; they call for homework, too. Researching the legitimacy of foreign schools can be a challenge, but consider it a warning sign if an applicant claims a degree from a country where she or he never lived.

The Federal Trade Commission provides the following tips on how to verify academic credentials:

Contact the school. Most college registrars will confirm dates of attendance and graduation, as well as degrees awarded and majors, upon request. If the applicant gives permission, they may provide a certified academic transcript. If you aren't familiar with the school, don't stop your research just because someone answers your questions on the phone or responds with a letter. Some diploma mills offer a "verification service" that send phony transcripts to prospective employers.

Continued on the next page.



Diploma Mills

...continued from page 1

Research the school on the Internet. Check to see if the school is accredited by a recognized agency. Colleges and universities accredited by legitimate agencies generally undergo a rigorous review of the quality of their educational programs. If a school has been accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency, it's probably legitimate. Many diploma mills claim to be "accredited," but the accreditation is from a bogus, but official-sounding, agency they invented.

You can use the Internet to check if a school is accredited by a legitimate organization at a new database of accredited academic institutions, posted by the U.S. Department of Education at www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation. (There are a few legitimate institutions that have not pursued accreditation.)

To find out if an accrediting agency is legitimate, check the list of recognized national and regional accrediting agencies maintained by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation at www.chea.org.

Look at the school's website. Although it is prudent to check out the school on the Internet, it's not always easy to pick out a diploma mill based on a quick scan of its site. Some diploma mills have slick websites, and a ".edu" Web address doesn't guarantee legitimacy. Nevertheless, the website can be a source of information. Indeed, federal officials say it's probably a diploma mill if:

1. Tuition is charged on a per-degree basis, rather than per credit hour, course, or semester
2. There are few or unspecified degree requirements, or none at all
3. The emphasis is on degrees for work or life experience, and
4. The school is relatively new, or has recently changed its name.

Check other resources. There is no comprehensive list of diploma mills on the Web because new phony credentialing sources arise all the time. However, the Oregon Student Assistance Commission's Office of Degree Authorization maintains a list of organizations it has identified as diploma mills at www.osac.state.or.us/oda. Another way to check up on a school is to call the registrar of a local college or university and ask if it would accept transfer credits from the school you are researching.

Ask the applicant for proof of the degree and the school's accreditation. If you don't get satisfactory answers from the school itself and the accreditation sites on the Web, ask the applicant for proof of the degree, including a certified transcript, and the school's accreditation. Ultimately, it's up to the applicant to show that he earned his credentials from a legitimate institution.

Degrees and diplomas issued by diploma mills have been used to obtain employment. Even if issuing or receiving a diploma mill qualification is legal, passing it off as an accredited one for personal gain is a crime in many areas. In some cases the diploma mill may itself be guilty of an offense, if it knew or ought to have known that the qualifications it issues are used for fraudulent purposes.

Diploma mills could also be guilty of fraud if they mislead customers into believing that the qualifications they issue are accredited or recognized, or make false claims that they will lead to career advancement, and accept money on the basis of these claims.

By Kelly Levy
Division of Personnel

Decisiveness

Jim Collins and the DNA of good decisions

After combing through 14 years of research, here's what *Good to Great* author Jim Collins says about the art of making decisions:

Great Decisions come from saying "I don't know." Collins asks:

"Which is best? Saying you don't know when you've already made up your mind? Or presuming to know when you don't and, therefore, lying to yourself? Or speaking the truth, which is: 'I don't yet know?'"

The higher the question/statement ratio, the better. The best leaders Collins studied did the best job at igniting debate using Socratic questions.

As for himself: "I tried to make heroes out of those on my team who identified flaws in my thinking," Collins says. "At the next meeting, I might say: 'I really want to give Leigh credit. She pushed my thinking, and I wasn't looking at this right.'"

Deciding is not about consensus. Debate can be "violent," but in the end, the leader makes the call. "No major decision we've studied was ever taken at a point of unanimous agreement," Collins says.

Great decisions come from external awareness. Fabulous organizations are internally driven but externally aware.

Even huge decisions decide only a tiny fraction of the outcome. "The big decisions are not like 60 of 100 points," Collins says. "They're more like six of 100 points. And there's a whole bunch of others that are like 0.6 or 0.006."

Think long term. Real leaders manage for the quarter-century, not the quarter.

You can make mistakes—even big ones—and prevail. What a relief.

-Adapted from "Jim Collins on Tough Calls," Jerry Useem, *Fortune*.

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Technical Knowledge

You can be sued for employees' commuting accidents

Don't let employees who feel ill or impaired in any way drive home from work. Reason: You could be found liable for any accidents they cause.

An important court ruling throws out the conventional wisdom that says companies aren't liable for employees' actions during their typical commute to and from work. This ruling says that if an employee can show that the job contributed to the accident, your company can be held liable.

Case in point: The day after a company sprayed its factory for bugs, an employee complained that she felt ill at work. A supervisor offered to send her to the company doctor, but she declined. While driving home, she rear-ended another car. She told police she felt lightheaded before the accident.

The person in the other car sued the company for her injuries. An appeals court let the case go to trial. Reason: Companies are usually liable for injuries caused by employees only when the employee is "acting within the course of employment." But an exception to this rule exists: If the company could have foreseen a potential risk and didn't stop it, it can be held liable for resulting injuries.

(Bussard v. Minimed Inc., 105 Cal.App. 4th 798, Cal.App., 2nd Dist.)

Bottom line: Pay attention to any illness or injury complaints that could be related to work. Be proactive. Provide transportation to medical care or home. Do the same in other circumstances in which driving might be impaired, such as after late-night work or where alcohol has been served. The cab ride home will be a bargain next to defending a lawsuit.

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Workforce Management

The enhanced PERforM system

If you didn't have a chance to read the summer edition of *Solutions*, it was announced that an enhanced PERforM system would be released this fall.

These enhancements were due in part to the feedback the Division of Personnel received from system users and agency personnel. Based on those comments, priority items were identified and a project plan was put into action.

As a result of these enhancements, PERforM users will benefit from expanded functionality, clarified

verbiage, and additional reference materials. PERforM users are encouraged to review all of the materials offered on the Division of Personnel's PERforM website, www.perform.mo.gov.

Of particular interest may be the *Frequently Asked Questions* which contains a variety of information on all facets of the online appraisal process.

Specific questions are welcome and can be directed to the Division of Personnel by using the *Contact Us* link provided on the PERforM website.

PERforM enhancements include such items as:

- Providing agencies more flexibility in the assignment of components.
- Adding a new system "role" which will aid agency personnel during the appraisal process.
- Allowing objectives to be copied from one type to another.
- Changing logic so the Edit link allows revisions to objectives already associated with an appraisal. Objectives that need only minor changes will no longer have to be deleted (expired) and replaced with a new (added) objective that contains corrected text.
- Returning the objectives (Performance Plan) "reviewed" button to "No" after an appraisal is created.
- Giving reviewers the ability to see the current objectives developed by the rater for employees whose appraisals they will review during the rating period.
- Incorporating more descriptive words in the system for clarification purposes and first-time users.
- Adding an optional (Other) signature line to the Performance Plan and Appraisal documents.
- Modifying timing out practices. Users will receive notification when there are 5 minutes remaining in their session. This will give users the opportunity to save work and continue (refresh) their current session. In the event that a user does not take appropriate action and the session is timed out, unsaved work will be lost but the user will still have the option of starting a new session allowing them to continue working in the system.
- Displaying error messages when users attempt to make changes to non-editable screens.
- Availability of a basic user manual.

By Marian Luebbert, Division of Personnel

Solutions

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The leadership challenge

Answer these four questions to assess how well you lead in certain circumstances.

1. **If you're angry or disappointed with an employee's actions, you're likely to:**
 - A. Express your disappointment or displeasure.
 - B. Let the person discover the consequences of his or her actions.
 - C. Think about the message you want to convey; then act accordingly.
 - D. Eat a carton of Twinkies to bury your disappointment.
2. **The most important trait for you to display when leading a team:**
 - A. The wisdom of Solomon
 - B. The inspirational power of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - C. The patience of Job
 - D. The restraint of Adam Sandler in Anger Management.
3. **When you lead a department meeting, you:**
 - A. Sum up the meeting's purpose--and warm up the crowd--with a quick monologue.
 - B. Ask open-ended questions and lead discussions.
 - C. Place a staff member in charge and observe the group dynamics.
 - D. Fall asleep during "Old Business."
4. **When one of your employees admits a mistake, the first thing you do is:**
 - A. Show support. ("It's great that you can admit your mistake.")
 - B. Downplay the mistake's impact. (Don't worry about it.)
 - C. Gently chastise the person. ("Let's make sure it doesn't happen again.")
 - D. Ask follow-up questions ("What else have you done wrong?")

Answers:

1. C. Leaders think before they speak, especially when negative emotions are involved...but D is tempting.
2. B. All are valuable, but leaders who can't inspire people aren't leaders
3. B. Leaders ask piercing questions and encourage free-flowing discussions...at least while they're awake.
4. A. Leaders support people who acknowledge their errors.

Credibility is important

I recall as a young teenager my father coming home from a trip with my first car, a 1970 Mustang. I was thrilled! But there was a condition to me getting the car. My father had called our banker from the dealership asking for a car loan, and it was going to be my responsibility to pay the note off at our local bank.

At the time, I remember my father telling me that all the banker said was, "Go ahead. Just drop by to sign the papers." The next day, I went with my father to meet our banker and signed on the dotted line for my first loan. For the next year I made my monthly payments, and in doing so created credit in my name. I will never forget how proud I was to make that last payment and have that title placed in my hands. By making good on my promise to pay, my credibility was established. I've been fortunate enough to repeat this process for other items in years since.

But instances like these make me wonder – is credibility still alive and well today? When a deal can be made on a handshake (or a word over the phone)? When one's word is all it takes to be believed and trusted?

In today's society, news reports often reflect the nation's concern over the perceived loss of leadership values, ethics, and integrity – all the things that equal credibility.

It has been said that credibility creates trust and that trust is the foundation of all relationships, personally and professionally. Good credibility equals good relationships and bad credibility equals bad relationships.

So, how does one establish credibility? Is it a given, or must it be built or earned over time? How does one become credible?

In his article "Why Leaders Fail", Mark Sanborn from *Leadership Now* states, "A leader's credibility is the result of two aspects: what he or she does (competency) and who he or she is (character). A discrepancy between these two aspects creates an integrity problem."

Sanborn contends that "The highest principle of leadership is integrity. When integrity ceases to be a leader's top priority, when a compromise of ethics is rationalized away as necessary for the 'greater good', when achieving results becomes more important than the means to their achievement—that is the moment when a leader steps onto the slippery slope of failure" and their credibility is jeopardized.

According to Sanborn, "It is imperative to your leadership that you constantly subject your life and work to the highest scrutiny."

Are there areas of conflict between what you believe and how you behave? If credibility is truly the result of both competency and character, where do you fall in the equation?

Try this, take out one of your business cards right now. On the back of the card write down your primary focus. In other words, what are you really here to do? If you think that you're credibility aspect isn't where it should be, start thinking about what you need to do to get back on track for both *you* and your organization.

By Lori Gilmore
Division of Personnel

Organizational change begins with leaders who walk and talk by transforming themselves, and then invite everyone in the organization to lead alongside them.

-Fortune Magazine

Vision

In search of effective team members? Look for these traits...

Teams require leaders, but their success depends on the traits and skills of their individual members. To keep a team running smoothly, emphasize and reinforce these essential behaviors:

Put the team first. Team members need to remember that it's not about them. While you value their skills and expertise, their priority must be helping the team perform successfully. When forming a team, look for people who don't crave the spotlight.

Be flexible. Even the best plans don't always work flawlessly. Successful team members are comfortable responding to changes in direction and priority without losing their overall sense of purpose—they don't have to be in control of every detail. Look for people who can adapt and move forward when circumstances change.

Trust—and be trustworthy. Team members depend on each other for assistance, effort, intelligence, and support. This requires everyone's patience, honesty, and good faith. Do people keep promises? Deliver bad news truthfully? Forgive mistakes quickly and avoid assigning blame?

Keep an open mind. A good team thrives on ideas—the more, the better. That means team members should resist the impulse to criticize and reject things too quickly. People need to know their thoughts and opinions will get a fair hearing; they want someone to listen and understand what they're saying. This keeps the lines of communication flowing and encourages suggestions and new ideas.

Have courage. Ambitious teams take risks—realistic ones, not foolish gambles. Team members need to be comfortable with that, and be willing to take the occasional risk (investing their time in an idea that might not work out, for example.) Don't punish honest mistakes or waste time on blame. Focus on the possibility of success, not the chance of failure.

--Adapted from "The skinny on improving teamwork: Five lessons for every business," by Marlene Chism, on SearchWarp.com

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Strategic Thinking

To conquer turnover, first calculate its true impact

Issue: Retaining key employees is more important than ever.

Risk: Turnover hurts the organization's bottom line.

Action: Use your calculations to support employee-retention efforts.

Even in this day of penny-pinching, few people understand how much money organizations lose by failing to retain key employees.

As an example, replacing an HR manager in the automotive industry is estimated to cost \$133,803. A machine-works company that loses a skilled, salaried machinist can lose \$102,796 from its bottom line. And the loss of a store manager can cost a major food chain up to \$21,931.

Now, here's your chance to calculate the cost of losing one of your organization's star performers. Thanks to consulting firm Kepner-Tregoe Inc., and the Saratoga Institute, here is a formula you can use.

Select a department, division or job function that has a lot of turnover. Write the number of people who left the job during the past 12 months on Line 4 below.

The average cost of turnover is 25 percent of an employee's annual salary (Line 1) plus the cost of the benefits (Line 2). Typical benefits amount to about 30 percent of wages. The total cost per employee (Line 3) is the total of Line 1 and Line 2.

1. Annual wage: _____ x .25= _____
2. Annual wage: _____ x .30= _____ x .25= _____
3. Total turnover cost per employee (add Lines 1 and 2): _____
4. Total number of employees who left: _____
5. Total cost of turnover (multiply Lines 3 and 4): _____

Here's an example:

1. Annual wage: \$35,000 x .25: \$8,750
2. Annual wage: \$35,000 x .30= \$10,500 x .25= \$2,625
3. Total turnover cost per employee: \$8,750 + \$2,625= \$11,375
4. Total number of employees who left: 10
5. Total cost of turnover: \$11,375 x 10= \$113,750

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Leadership is not about making yourself more powerful. It's about making people around you more powerful.

-Betty Linton

Self-Direction

Improve your management style with employee surveys

If you want to improve your leadership skills and advance your career, you can't rely only on books and bosses to tell you how to do it. You need honest feedback about how your management style is perceived from those who experience it daily—your staff.

Listed below are just a few sample questions for a survey. Note: You may want to make your survey anonymous so no one feels obligated to sugarcoat responses.

1. How well do I communicate to you what I expect from you?
2. Am I too involved with your work, or not involved enough?
3. Do you feel comfortable asking me questions and discussing work-related concerns with me?
4. How do I show you that I'm interested in your success at this company?
5. Do I listen to new ideas?
6. Do I treat everyone fairly?
7. Do I understand our industry and how our company fits into it?
8. What do you wish I would do differently?

-Adapted from *The Only Thing that Matters*, by Karl Albrecht (HarperBusiness)

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Team Work

Wisdom of the ages

If you gathered 100 experienced managers together and asked for their advice, they probably wouldn't say much about "competing values models" or "temporal rhythms." Instead, this is a good idea of what you'd hear:

"Don't be afraid of saying I don't know." If you don't know the answer, don't try to bluff. If you're at fault, take the blame. If you're wrong, apologize. A wise person once said, "If you always tell the truth, you never have to remember anything."

"Never gossip." And if someone wants to gossip with you, politely say you're not interested. This corporate adage rings true: When someone gossips, two careers are hurt—the person being talked about, and the person doing the talking.

"No task is beneath you." Don't think you are above anything. Be the good example and pitch in—especially if the job is one that nobody wants to do.

"Share the credit whenever possible." Managers who spread credit around look much stronger than those who take all the credit themselves.

Mentoring

Unconventional leadership approaches

Here are two approaches to leadership that have served one senior manager very well:

1. Think and act as if you work for your employees—not the other way around. Words like "boss" and "direct report" or "subordinate" reinforce the idea that your employees work and support you. A more fruitful way to think about the relationship is that you should carry the support role.

Your support takes many forms. You have to ensure that employees have everything they need to do their jobs well—tools, resources and information. In addition, you should serve as a sounding board for new ideas, a facilitator to help get things done and a mentor skilled and willing to give advice and feedback.

"Keep your salary to yourself."

Discussing salary is a no-win proposition. Either you'll be upset because someone is making more than you, or someone will be upset with you.

"When you don't like someone, don't let it show." Especially if you outrank them. Never burn bridges or offend others as you move ahead.

"Let it go." What shouldn't happen often does: You weren't given the project you wanted, you were passed over for the promotion you deserved. Be gracious and diplomatic...and move on. Harboring a grudge won't advance your career.

"When you're right, don't gloat." The only time you should ever use the phrase "I told you so" is if someone says to you: "You were right. I really could succeed at that project."

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To offer this kind of support and do it well, you have to work on yourself. It's not easy. You must be approachable, open-minded, empathetic and a skilled listener.

2. Don't try to motivate people—focus on removing de-motivating conditions. People want to work and do their best. Let them!

One way to do this is to spend time thinking about conditions that might de-motivate employees and remove them. You'll gain much more by eliminating de-motivating conditions than by creating new incentives, bonuses and perks.

-Adapted from Jim O'Shea, NEPA Hotline.

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