

# ACHIEVING PERFORMANCE

## *Managerial Bravery*

Managers are challenged to create the conditions that support and encourage their staff to achieve and maintain performance. Sometimes, this can be a very daunting and frustrating experience. Here's a case study, where a manager tried a different approach and achieved surprising results.

Let's look at Sharma and Peter (not their real names).

Sharma had inherited a business unit that was populated with what seemed to be under-performers. They weren't paying adequate attention and, as a result, their work was embedded with errors. This created ongoing grief for downstream business units. But nothing she said or did was having an effect. She was getting push-back from the staff, while there was mounting pressure to correct the situation.

At our monthly coaching sessions, managers embrace the opportunity to share their activities and experiences with one another, and to receive peer feedback and advice. When it came to Sharma, she quite literally was beaming and said:

"I have something great to share, today. I tried something Bill suggested."

I put my head in my hands, wondering what was to come.

"What was that Sharma?" I asked.

"You said make it a game."

I didn't quite remember saying that. Certainly I said that we should have fun and that we needed to re-discover playfulness at work. I also said that you might consider trying a different approach. The worse that could happen is it won't work, but it's not working now. So what do you have to lose?

Sharma had created a game, where the staff got points for doing their work. It was structured so that they were not playing against one another, but rather each person could amass an unlimited number of points. As trivial or juvenile as this may sound, it resonated with her staff and things changed dramatically.

Almost immediately, staff became more invested in their jobs, the error rate plummeted and through-put increased. The energy, volume and laughter also increased, and this was observed and commented on by other business units.

Perhaps what most surprised Sharma was that the month-end results showed that Peter was the winner and he was presented with the company's 'Employee of the Month Award'. Up until that time, Peter had been the weakest, least engaged and whiniest performer of her staff.



For the following month, the game incorporated an additional component around presentation skills. Staff had to book the meeting room, make equipment arrangements and deliver a 3-minute presentation. These are all things that they had never done before. Guess who was first? Right, it was Peter, who again won the game.

As Sharma's business unit moves forward with this game, the staff have taken greater ownership in shaping its evolution. Somehow, this game has become the catalyst and platform to support the staff in achieving and maintaining their performance.

What was it that captured Peter's attention and enthusiasm? How had a simple game inspired staff to perform, where previously no amount of conversation, coaching and cajoling was making an impact? Could it be that converting work which had been perceived as drudgery into a playful activity influenced their attitudes, behaviours and performance?

I acknowledged Sharma's accomplishment with her peers. I stressed that, in my opinion, the most important element was that she had demonstrated **managerial bravery** by trying something different. The fact that it turned out to be so successful definitely was a bonus.

As managers, we tend to be reluctant to try new approaches, even if things aren't working properly now. This inertia is anchored in our latent insecurity and fear of failure. We need to recognize this and then develop strategies to try new approaches or we risk failure by maintaining the status quo.

Creative disruption is pervasive and accelerating. Managers need to harness and navigate opportunities to implement change or fall victim to externalities. Yes, there are risks. Yes, it's intimidating and maybe even a little scary. But make it a game – try a different approach.

Bill Fields, President [bfields@diamondmanagementinstitute.com](mailto:bfields@diamondmanagementinstitute.com) 905-820-8308

*Diamond Management Institute* [www.diamondmanagementinstitute.com](http://www.diamondmanagementinstitute.com) develops high-performance organizations through strategy alignment, leadership and team development, business process improvement, and customer engagement.

Clients include Compugen, Samuel Son & Co., Home Trust, College Student Alliance, Terra Greenhouses, Crawford Chondon and Partners LLP, JTAC, Consumers Glass, Kodak, Lear, MTHA, Navistar, BASF, City of Mississauga, Dofasco, Technical Standards and Safety Authority, Textron Automotive, TD Bank Financial Group, Greenwin Property Management, Sheridan College, Canadian Standards Association, SOCAN, The Walkerton Inquiry, and the Governments of Canada, Ontario and Bermuda.

