**Recognition and Leveraging Strength Increase Job Satisfaction**

Recognition from a manager can encourage positive behavior and help promote long-term top performance of employees.

When Louie first became the supervisor of a sourcing department, he was responsible for managing three subordinates: Charlie Lu, an engineer who focused on managing machined parts suppliers; Hunk Mao, an engineer who focused on managing casting suppliers; and Wendy Wang, a purchase assistant who focused on supplier selection and price negotiation of indirect materials. Although Wendy was an enthusiastic employee, she was trained as a human resource specialist and had little experience about sourcing and purchasing. The reason she joined Louie’s team was a result of a company restructure through which Wendy took on responsibilities in addition to her usual HR tasks.

Louis understood that Wendy’s deficiency in sourcing related skills required significant training and had already taken the steps necessary to ensure that. However, from Louie’s perspective, the most important step was to help Wendy build her self-confidence in accomplishing her new job. Louie learned from Wendy’s previous manager that she had excelled at her human resource specialist position due to her superb communication skills. As sourcing also requires effective communication skills, Louie told Wendy that he had full confidence and trust in her ability to complete the sourcing tasks. To show his confidence, he allowed her to immediately complete the purchase work of office supplies and some simple MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Operation) consumables. He reassured her that it was okay to make mistakes as one can learn from them. After experiencing several successes in purchasing, Wendy became familiar with purchase procedures and built her confidence to do the purchase job well.

Charlie Lu is the eldest member in Louie’s team and has more than ten years of work experience in purchasing. He is good at price and cost analysis and likes to scrutinize details. However, he has an introverted and agreeable character, which limits his ability to negotiate with partners. By contrast, Hunk Mao has an extraverted character who is charming and quick thinking but is not as thoughtful as Charlie Lu. Both of them have their own strengths and weaknesses. To maximize the utility of his workers, Louie leveraged their strengths and competences. Instead of spending time coaching each of them to improve their weakness, Louie assigned Charlie Lu more responsibilities on quotation analyses and contract preparation while Hunk Mao was assigned to perform negotiations. This arrangement allows the employees to not only perform to their advantages, but allows them to enjoy what they do.

Louie’s situation is reflective of academic research that shows helping employees develop an already strong capability into an extraordinary one has greater impact on performance results than trying to turn a weak competency into just an OK one. Knowing employees’ traits or qualities, and then helping them experience success by using and building on their natural strengths can increase their confidence in their abilities. By acknowledging their efforts, contributions, and achievements, leaders can then motivate them with positive feelings about their jobs and thus increase their job satisfaction.