Embrace Risk in Hiring and Supervision

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Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

> "It is not the manager's job to prevent risks. It's the manager's job to make it safe to take them."
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> – *Creativity Inc. by Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace*

When you hire and supervise people, there are some risks you should never take. Don't assume payroll will take care of itself. Don't pay someone a salary you know is grossly unfair for the position. And don't brush aside reports of misconduct without investigation. But hiring and supervision present important, and necessary, risk-taking opportunities. Hiring and supervision create close relationships, and interpersonal relationship will not grow if the parties involved don't take some risks. Here are some ways to take meaningful risks in hiring and supervision that can help all parties grow.

Be vulnerable. This doesn't mean babbling about yourself. It means that sometimes, when it's appropriate, you share stories with your employees about times when you struggled, failed, and succeeded. This shows them they're not alone in facing challenges.

Rethink your concept of risk in hiring. You may think your biggest talent risk is hiring someone who lacks experience or doesn't fit in with your organization. But many people respond well to training, and great organizational cultures grow and evolve. The biggest risk you face is hiring too many people who are too similar—to each other and to you. Groupthink stifles creativity and innovation. To help combat groupthink, center your hiring process and criteria more in skills than experience—ask a candidate to walk you through how they would solve a problem your organization might face.

Talk less. You may feel like you achieved your role as a manager based on what you know. But now that you have this role, what you know is less important. What's most important when leading others is how you make people feel. Experiment with talking half as often as you normally would in a meeting. Ask questions and listen. If you listen, you're more likely to see what your employees need from you.

Ask the question you don't want to ask. If you can't see what your employees need from you, ask. Ask them if the way you give feedback works for them—even if it makes you nervous to ask that question. Listen to their answers. If they ask for change, deliver it if you can, and explain why if you can't.

Take time to reflect. This feels impossible at the pace at which our organizations and initiatives move. It's also necessary. Take "balcony time" away from your desk with no interruptions—even 15 to 30 minutes a week—to dream and vision the future of your team. And schedule time in your one-on-one meetings weekly or monthly for employees to reflect on their recent high points and low points. This is where learning happens.

Delegate more. It's true, no one else will do a task just the way you would. Someone else might do a great job, but they might also struggle, stumble, or miss a deadline. And that's fine. If you give your team members a chance to take on more tasks, you'll discover new ways of doing things, as well as opportunities to give constructive feedback. And your employees will get the opportunity to try, fail, succeed, learn, and grow.

Get curious. Asking a question that doesn't relate to the day's task list or the bottom line could feel like an unnecessary risk or distraction. It also could lead you to more engaged, interesting, and productive relationships with your team members. Don't probe into personal matters, but seek opportunities to learn more about the people who work for you. Ask them why they did a task a certain way, or what their favorite and least favorite parts of a project were. You won't be just checking off a to-do item; you'll build a foundation for a stronger relationship.

Mistakes happen. Let them. If you think you see an employee headed for a misstep, stop and ask yourself how big a deal that is. Might whatever upheaval will occur still matter in a few days, or a week? If not, your effort to head off the mistake might deprive your employee and your team of a great learning opportunity. Of course, you should never allow bigotry, bullying, or harassment. But if the mistake wouldn't be offensive or hurtful, let it happen if you can.

Spend a significant amount of time with your employees talking about their strengths. Why would you want to invest time in talking about something that's going right when other things might be going wrong? Because focusing on employees' strengths empowers them, engages them, and helps them pursue new areas of growth. Employees who understand what they do well grow in confidence and take on new tasks. That helps the whole team.

Additional Resources

- The Real Risk in Hiring – Carly Fiorina
- The 25 Micro-Habits of High-Impact Managers – First Round Review