

First, Break All The Rules: What The World's Greatest Managers Do Differently

Book by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, Simon and Schuster, 1999

Book Review by Herb Rubenstein, President, Sustainable Business Group

Introduction

One factor in determining how long an employee is willing to stay with an organization is the quality of the management to whom the employee reports. Contrary to popular belief the more talented the employee, the more (better) management that employee requires to reach his or her potential. These and other valuable lessons are published in this book summarizing interviews with over 80,000 managers in over 400 companies performed by the Gallup organization.

Key Concepts in the Book

Great managers “individualize.” They do not try to create one set of rules that applies to each employee, each customer or each situation. Great managers are “judgment based” not “rules based” decision makers.

Each manager must develop and perfect his or her own style and apply it consistently.

Managers and great employees must be brilliant at anticipating.

Managers must make each employee comfortable with the way they are, not insecure and not be so demanding on the employee that the employee constantly lives outside his or her comfort zone, always insecure and fearful.

Managers must listen to employees and be interested in them as human beings, not just tools to achieve quarterly goals.

If one is going to fire someone, do it fast.

If a manager gives an order, it must be supported 100% backed up by the manager. Saying “Corporate made me do it,” poisons the well.

Managers should make few promises and must keep all of them.

Goal of management –turn talent into performance.

Profits and a successful business begin by building a work environment that attracts, focuses and keeps talented employees (citing The Service Profit Chain by Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger).

Today, there is no simple and accurate measuring stick to tell how well a manager is doing.

Pay for performance systems are vital to high productivity.

Workers need 1) to know what is expected of them, 2) have the right materials, 3) must be acknowledged regularly, 4) be listened to, and 5) be able to learn and grow on the job.

Great managers do not try to change people. They hire people that fit into what they need. Then they maximize the potential the employee already has.

Self managed teams are usually a disaster. Every team needs a manager, a leader.

The distinction between great managers and great leaders is one of focus. Great managers focus inward, getting the best out of what they've got. Great leaders look outward, toward the future, seeking alternatives, patterns, connections and pursuing a vision that only a few can see.

The four basic roles of managers are 1) select people; 2) set expectations; 3) motivate people; 4) develop people.

Behavior is generally recurring, forming a pattern. The manager must discern behavior pattern very quickly. Behaviors, once formed into patterns, are very difficult to change in the work context without extraordinary interventions and investments.

Managers must know and be able to measure the range of performance outcomes that are reasonable to expect in each person and in each job. Managers must know the minimum, the maximum and the average expected performance level and must set expectations as to what is acceptable, not acceptable and what is to be considered outstanding performance. This is the setting of standards.

Managers must assist workers in learning, knowing what new things they need to know, widening their perspective and focusing them on where they need to excel.

Many jobs require precision. Generally, either a person loves precision or does not consider it important. Either way, it is difficult to change an adult's view in this area.

The three basic categories of talent are: 1) striving; 2) thinking; and 3) relating.

Attitudes and "drive" form key parts of a person's recurring patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Attitudes and drive of workers are very difficult for managers to help employees change.

Every job requires a special set of talents and each manager must know what talents are required for each job.

Managers are always “on the stage.” Employees must also act like they are always on the stage.

A list of well recognized talents.

empathy, warmth

discipline

precision, accuracy

on-time

desire/ability to learn

creativity

joyful, happiness

realism

organization

coachable

memory

sincerity

motivation

visionary

leadership

planning, strategic thinking

thinking, insight, focus

physical strength

independence

trustful

role player

gregarious

thrifty

discernment

exciting

assertiveness

ethical, honesty

long term focus

short term focus

confrontation

cooperative

calm

flexibility

respectful

confidence

responsibility, dependability

listening, understanding, observing

drive, achievement focus,

goal oriented

courage, ability to perform in face of fear

communication (writing, speaking)

Managers must not micromanage their employees. Managers must decide the right, sought after outcomes. Employees must develop the best road for them to achieve these outcomes.

Managers must not be “suckered” into buying into excuses for a worker failing to meet a performance objective, especially if the objective is not met on a regular basis.

Managers must recognize those patterns of behavior that lead to success and failure and demand that patterns that lead to success be strengthened and those that lead to failure be eliminated.

When creating steps for a company to follow, or “plays” for a sports team to follow, always go from the players to the plays and not vice versa.

A manager can describe in great detail the unique talents and strengths of each employee.

A manager’s job is to “cast” their employees properly, showcasing their strengths.

Managers treat each employee as that employee should be treated, not “like the manager would like to be treated.” Good-bye Golden Rule.

Managers should ask employees how each wants to be treated, managed.

Managers should spend the most time with their best, most productive people. Time = investment.

Each employee should be given a unique set of expectations by each manager, often after hearing the employee’s point of view on what should be expected of them.

Managers notice and deal with “non-performance” immediately.

Managers notice and acknowledge/reward excellent/outstanding performance immediately.

Managers should encourage workers to form partnerships with other workers.

Managers create “heroes,” by creating and articulating levels of achievement and creating the “hero category.”

The key to a healthy, successful career is “self-discovery” - - discovery of what you do/like best and then doing it better and better over time through growth and learning. Self-discovery is a great source of energy and enthusiasm.

Feedback for employees should be constant and should focus primarily on the future. I call this “feed forward.”

Great managers ask “why” when standards are not met and then decide on a course of action.

Managers should create performance systems where employees keep track of their own performance.

Conclusion

These 44 rules are the new rules of running a business, a non-profit or educational organization. We hope you find them useful in your organization.

About the Author

Herb Rubenstein is President of the Sustainable Business Group, Inc., a consulting firm to businesses and governments. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc. – High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations (Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 1999) and author of Leadership for Lawyers (American Bar Association, 2008). He has also served as an Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurism at George Mason University and Colorado State University, was a founding director of the Association of Professional Futurists, and is the author of numerous articles on business and strategic planning.

He has his law degree from Georgetown University, his Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Bristol in Bristol, England and was a Phi Beta Kappa/Omicron Delta Kappa graduate from Washington and Lee University in 1974. His email herb@sbizgroup.com and he can be reached at 303 279-1878. For more information about the Sustainable Business Group, see www.sbizgroup.com.