

Can or does one employee make a difference?

When does one employee's talent outweigh the importance and contributions of the rest of the team? Rarely, but

Earlier this year Human Capital Advisors addressed the Le'Veon Bell challenge that our favorite team was faced with and, true to predictions, the team suffered mightily as a result of the loss of that talent. Would this team have done better, perhaps won one more game, or likely multiples, and clinched the division and positioned themselves as a high seed in the playoffs? We'll never know, but with the lackluster performance in critical situations that kind of talent can make a difference.

Well...here we are again, this time with an exceptional wide receiver. Is history going to repeat itself. We'll see. But there IS a way to manage this.

Several years ago I worked for a very unique high technology manufacturer who employed some 'best in class' brilliant engineers. This was an exceptional team assembled and recruited by our team and the hiring managers. It was the first time we had used the methodology that HCA uses today. It worked so well that the organization went from being a strong competitor in their space to the best in class – head and shoulders above all of the rest – with revenues and products that demonstrated it. We'd like to take some credit for that success, but in hindsight there was one difference. We had 'Dave'! Not me – I'm not anywhere near this individual's brilliance. But he was our most valuable engineer – in fact – he was our most valuable employee!!! Now in a world where the team is essential and everyone must pull their weight – especially in business – actually in any field – think Dr. Thomas Starzyl here or Jonas Salk – you get the message – a single talent can make a difference. But 'Dave' was known by our entire organization as the most talented most intelligent, most studied, most brilliant technical mind we had on the team. So did our competitors. He was constantly being sought by all of them. But he liked his boss, he liked his freedom, and he liked the ability to create and develop new products and innovations that he would not get the chance to do anywhere else. He was that guy who anyone could go to and ask how to solve a problem they'd been trying to solve for days – and he'd solve it in mere minutes. He was an expert – no he was a master. How did we manage him? We provided him with resources, tools, support, pretty much whatever he needed to keep those solutions and new creations coming forward. He was the best – and renown throughout our industry. He was happy and so were we.

Fast forward to our neighborhood team down the street in the big house by the river – you know – the one with the world's best ketchup – yeah that one. Exceptional talent will always bubble to the top. Some get there by pure hard work. Diligently honing their craft day in and day out, always doing what they need to do to be better tomorrow than they are today. If you ever get the chance to watch that ice team practice up in Cranberry – go do it. Their leader, he wears a 'C' on his sweater – is always – and I mean always – working to make his skill better. He doesn't have to – he's the best on frozen water – but he has and will continue to make a huge difference. No you say – one individual doesn't make a difference? Take him off that frozen pond over the past decade and see how many fans are in the stands and how many championships those birds would have won. Yes, one individual, with humility and willingness to work harder than the rest, but gifted with talent beyond compare – like 'Dave' can and does make a difference.

Dr. Starzyl didn't pioneer transplants because he thought he'd make a lot of money or that it would bring him fame, he did it because he was driven to do and test and follow with an unquenchable passion something that he knew could work and would save hundreds – no thousands of other lives. He committed so much of his energy to mastering this effort that he changed the world. So did a young man by the name of Fred Rogers. Having been blessed to have known and conversed with Fred for several years in my career it was very obvious that he was so driven and so clear about his vision that he was on a completely different plane than everyone else around him. He made a difference – and the world is a better place because of him. I remember hearing the story of a young ambitious golfer who was working on his game who asked another local giant for some advice – and possibly a promotion – to help his game. Arnie Palmer asked him how many balls he hit each day. He responded – at least 1,000 – in the most proud and unfortunately boastful manner. Mr. Palmer responded – when you get to 10,000 come back to see me. The passion may spike for a while, but if it can't carry you through the down time when no one else is watching and when you know your effort will eventually pay off – when you hit 10,000 – come back and see me.

So how does a team manage such an individual. Differently than the other employees. All of the players on the team in that club house work really, really hard. But every once in a while a few exceptional ones come around. If you don't have the management capability to motivate, drive, encourage and develop them – they're not going to perform, and they are not going to contribute. It takes a special skill to understand, appreciate, manage and feed that level of talent. Very few have it. Yeah, there's a lot of noise pointed at one player right now, as there was earlier in the season. Now is when true leadership is demonstrated. Think of one of the greatest management talents to grace our little village. He graduated from a Division II school in western Ohio, the University of Dayton, and went on to become one of the greatest managers of talent in this sport we've ever witnessed. Yep, it takes a leader like Chuck Noll to manage that level of talent, and, without question, he did it in a motivating, caring, but deliberate way. Learning how to select talent is masterful. Managing that talent is an art only developed through a commitment to understanding people – it's understanding the value of human capital.