

# It's the Manager, Stupid

## Three C's of Great Managers



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**B**efore you take offense at the title of this column, please note that it is pointed at me. I'm the one who is stupid. I learn over and over that my success, and the success of my business, is dependent on the managers I hire. I seem to relearn this lesson about every 12 months. Maybe if I write it down, I'll remember it.

Your managers are the lifeblood of your business. A good location, great products and a healthy market are meaningless without good managers. Together, these elements spell opportunity, not success. Even in terrific markets, some companies succeed, some barely get by and others fail.

Weak employees who work for great managers can become average employees. Good employees will turn into exceptional employees, or great managers in their own right. What do you get when you hire a weak manager? Managers who will chase away good employees and your customers. Weak managers will surround themselves with mediocrity, lest they be shown up.

Several years ago, we lost a manager at one of our locations. He had run a pretty good crew,

and his store was consistently profitable. After he left, the new manager seemed to do all the right things, but he just couldn't turn a profit. For two years, we made apologetic sounds when we reviewed the results. "Well, he's still learning, but he has a lot of potential." Later on, we moved to, "Boy, it sure is a tough market. It's hard to put together a deal down there." At some point we switched to, "Well, he's improving; he broke even last month." It's pretty sad when breaking even starts to look like a good month.

That manager eventually moved on to another company, and we found a replacement. Our "difficult location" in a "difficult market" was in the black at the end of the first month, and by the third month, the results were back to what they had been several years before. It was one of our most profitable locations again. At that point, a light bulb went on over our heads, and we stated the obvious: "It's the manager, stupid."

That would be little more than an interesting story if we hadn't already learned that lesson many times. We are very good at making apologetic noises about poor performance. In part, I think this happens because we

like our managers, and we want them to succeed. Perhaps we also are unwilling to admit that we made a bad hiring decision.

I'll repeat it again: It's the manager, stupid. Your great managers will consistently attract great employees and put together great deals, month after month, in good times and in bad. Don't make apologies for poor results from your managers, and don't settle for weak managers.

Well, if a good manager is what we need, what does a good manager look like? We have repeatedly heard and came to believe that great managers can be defined by the three Cs: Character, Competence, and Consistency.

**Character** – Great managers have great character. They have developed a set of standards for themselves, and they won't compromise their standards for themselves or for others. They will invest in the character of their team members. They are regularly working to improve themselves and everyone around them, and they will consistently avoid the landmines that take out many employees. Think back over some of the employees you have lost in the past 10 years. What took them out? Many of them succumbed to their own weaknesses—infidelity often leading to divorce, drug/alcohol abuse, dishonesty, or simply living beyond their means.

**Competence** – Great managers know how to do their jobs. They manage well and bring out the

best in their subordinates. We have an employee we regularly move from location to location, and we can tell which location he is working at by the sales numbers. Great managers find deals that mediocre managers can't see.

**Consistency** – Character and competence are great, but without consistency, you have a manager who will let you down when times get hard. Inconsistent managers can't lead their teams because they aren't consistent in their own lives. They work hard for a month or two, and then they get distracted and their work ethic falls apart. They seem to insist on honesty, and then one day you find out that they have been using your cash to play video poker. They seem to be loyal fathers and husbands, and then one day they move in with a co-worker after they are kicked out by their spouse. Those same inconsistencies are visible to the managers' employees every day in a hundred small ways. The employees are supposed to be on time, but the manager is regularly late to work. The employee's paperwork is supposed to be organized and legible, but the manager's paperwork is a mess. Competence and character can't sustain if it isn't accompanied by consistency.

Take a minute to look at your work groups. Is one department, location or team consistently failing to meet goals? Chances are it's the manager. **ADM**

