

Handling the high-flyer

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If you find you've got a 'star performer' in your department, you may have to adjust your systems agenda to accommodate him (or her), without making the other team members feel that you're showing favouritism.

The trouble is that high-flyers aren't generally happy to work within a team they're much happier working with a supporting cast of their own. Usually, the team is quite prepared to acknowledge star status - provided that standing has been justly earned.

However, if someone is delivering exceptional results, first double-check that these are what they appear to be. It is possible for someone's record to look artificially good. (You will probably remember Nick Leeson, the junior trader who brought about the collapse of London's old-established Barings Bank.)

Are you genuinely comparing like with like? Has this person been working under the same conditions as the rest, with no special influencing factors?

Might they have been cutting corners that you haven't noticed? Or encroaching upon someone else's territory? Are all results evaluated according to the same criteria?

If the results are confirmed to be outstanding, then that person should be officially declared a Rain Maker - someone whose efforts are benefitting everyone, and who should be allowed an amount of flexibility and freedom.

Selective concessions

As for how much leeway to allow, that can be a tricky decision. Generally the privileges should reflect the particular talent shown.

If we're talking about a successful client-handler entertaining new business, then you might allow rather more expenses than usual.

If the star has become popular around the industry for colourful costumes and outrageous humour, then the office dress-code should not be applied too closely to that person, and a certain amount of teasing could be tolerated.

But none of this should override your role as boss, and morale will certainly suffer if the 'star' is allowed to get away with too much. If they seem to be taking advantage of their special status, then it may be necessary to have an informal conversation with them to assert the point.

Remember too, the downside of employing a star. If the department has changed on account of their arrival, it will have to change again upon their departure - which is not 'if', but 'when'.

You cannot let yourself be disoriented by the departure of one staff member, however outstanding. That is also worth bearing in mind when you are considering whether or not to bring in someone who has already proved their star quality.

A star may turn out to be a grand misfit who can upset the atmosphere in the department or attempt to

change it to fit his own aspirations to the detriment of the greater good.

But the successfully handling of a star is a big accolade for any manager.

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