

Is There a Terrorist Lurking In Your Organization?

Mike Tyler, the CEO of XS-POT Manufacturing, was working hard to retrain his company. Over the past few years it had fallen to mere mediocrity, but he wanted his company once again to become one that his competitors would consider formidable.

Mike identified some real performance problems in the largest employee base in the company – manufacturing. The problems appeared to be growing worse no matter what the department managers did. He also noticed though, that it was just a couple of departments that had the most significant problems. Carefully analyzing the company as a whole, as well as the overall manufacturing group, Mike had recently come to recognize that there are basically three types of employees. He also saw that each one would affect the company in different ways. After studying this revelation carefully, he concluded that designing and executing effective solutions based on this information would be the key to the company's turn-around success. Today, he decided, it was time to present these findings and the talent man-



agement strategy he wanted executed. So Mike arranged for a meeting in the conference room with Beverly, the HR Vice President, and with Dan, the Director of Manufacturing, to solicit the help of these key leaders and to get their thoughts and valuable input.

After grabbing a cup of fresh coffee, Dan and Beverly joined Mike at the conference table and immediately sensed the serious look on Mike's face. Mike then started off the meeting with "Thanks for taking time out of your very busy schedules. I've been doing a lot of thinking lately about our recent performance problems. I know we've talked about this before, but I want us to consider taking a new approach today. I think I know what the exact problem is, how to quantify it, and exactly how it can be solved." This immediately caught Dan and Bev's attention. They had been discussing performance concerns for some time, but never were able to quite pinpoint the problem. Dan spoke first, "Hey I'm listening and I'm glad to hear that there's going to be some positive changes coming soon. We sure could use a breath of fresh air around here. This recession and the morale around our productivity initiatives seem to really have us dragging." "I understand. Not long ago," said Mike, "I was doing some reading and discovered an article about a survey from Gallup that identified three types of employees. They labeled the three groups as Engaged, Not-

Engaged, and Actively Disengaged. The report said that the Engaged group consisted of about 29% of the employees, the Not-Engaged made up about 56%, and the Actively Disengaged made up the remaining 15%." Dan added, "I think that sounds about like what we see here, too." "I doubt," said Bev as she scribbled those numbers on her notepad, "that it is much different here than anywhere else, since all companies have a mix of employees. When we do performance appraisals, we grade Low, Middle, & High... so we're in the same mindset." Mike continued. "Yes – I think that we are correctly identifying three different groups. I just want to re-label the groups, using terms that will make sense in a little different way.

And more importantly will motivate us to actually do more to fix the problem." "Actually I've been trying to categorize our employees for a while, too," said Bev, "but I have got way more than three categories. Is this realistic? Can you really reduce humans to a mere three types?" "Of course," Mike said, "we all know that the number of divisions in any set are always dependent on the purpose of why you want to make the divisions. In this strategy, there is only one purpose, and that is the growth and overall health of the company. For the purpose of this talk, let's start out by calling them A, B, and C." "Group A is the set of employees that any employer would want. Let's call them the 'Loyalists.' They look for problems and seek to provide workable solutions. In that same survey, Gallup also found that the Loyalists – as I call them – are more energetic and productive, stay with the company longer, and create better customer relationships.

Some of them even admitted that they feed off of the ideas of others around them and they are willing to use their creativity for the good of the company. They make up the backbone of any company. Without them, any company would surely fail." "Yeah," quipped Bev,



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“but identifying those in this group can be tough without outside help. Sometimes we can’t see the forest for the trees. Relationships and changing perceptions about our people can make it hard to nail down where employees are at any given point. For example, Where an outsider might see a C-type employee who is a complete non-contributor, we might only see Dave, the guy who very politely compliments me on my dress and was a huge hit at last year’s Christmas party.” “And the other managers and I can’t always tell by looking at them, either,” Dan spoke up. “You know that some employees like to put on a show when they think the boss is watching. So maybe we do need a professional to help us with the assessment process.”

“I agree with both of you,” Mike quickly added so he could continue with his next point. “The next group – group B – I want to call ‘Benign Saboteurs.’ Dan, they are like the ones that you mentioned that can kind of sense when they are being watched. During that time, they look good. They are ‘Benign’ because they are basically good, but they may actually see sabotage and not report it. They really are not against the real problem creators, and not really for the company, either. The problem with them is that they are still indirectly sabotaging the goals and performance of the plant – or at least allowing it to happen. They are neither hot nor cold – mostly lukewarm when it comes to loyalty. They go with the flow and like to blend in with whatever group they are exposed to at the moment. They are mostly followers – rarely leaders and easily influenced and misdirected.” “Wow,” muttered Dan. “I think I see where this is going. Simple, but still, I think you may be hitting it right on the head. There is no doubt that some of these ‘Benign Saboteurs’ can certainly affect our operations, even though they may not be directly responsible or involved.” “Ultimately,” said Bev, “I’m sure that the next ones you are going to mention are the ‘Saboteurs,’ since you said there were only three groups. But I can also see that this group of Benign Saboteurs could be very dangerous too, although possibly through simple inaction, indifference, or worse yet – inaction from the saboteurs. No matter

where they work – on the line, in R&D, in customer relations, shipping, sales, or wherever – their ‘whatever’ attitude and lack of commitment affects those around them. If only we could identify them before they get into the company, it would sure make our lives easier.” “That’s right,” Mike interjected, “and that’s an interview assessment topic for another day, OK? I’m just glad you’re on the same page with me on this – so far. Now, let me get to the third group – the ones I’m actually going to call ‘Terrorists.’” “Say what? That’s a pretty strong term you’re using there, Mike,” said Dan. “I’m not sure that they really live up to that strong of a reputation. And isn’t that politically incorrect to call someone who works for you a terrorist?” “I agree,” piped in Bev, “I can just see the looks we’ll get from that one,” as she rolled her eyes and then took another sip of her still-hot coffee. “OK, OK, I agree, it is a strong term,” Mike admitted. “Remember, though, that I said I’ve given considerable thought to this. I might add that I have talked these terms over with some of our Board Members and senior leaders to see what they thought. Frankly, they had the same initial reservations as you – until I explained it fully to them.” “I’m using the term ‘Terrorists’ because I think that there are some clear similarities. Terrorists, for one thing, do not identify themselves as such, especially not before they do their damage. In fact, they look like the others, often act like other employees, but their objectives are clearly mischievous and detrimental, creating problems, or always focusing on the negative side of things, telling you why something can’t be done now. They always have their own objectives for why they come to work, and it usually does not have much to do with actual work, or cooperation – at least not the way the company sees it. They can even be leaders, but usually will have selfish ambitions, different values, or may allow a cultural misfit to motivate them to take action that’s not in the company’s best interest.” “Now,” said Mike, “So what do you two think is the end result of a terrorist in our workplace?” “Well,” said Dan thoughtfully. “They cause confusion, disruption, productivity losses, hurt

feelings, and they typically want senior management’s daily attention. I actually spend more time managing these people and the problems they create than any other issue in the company. “What can you add to that, Bev?” said Mike, looking at her.

“I’m not sure,” she said, “but I sure know some people around here that you always steer clear of because you know it won’t take much to set them off, and they always cause a ruckus about something – making mountains out of molehills. I also know that those same people are the ones that are the most challenging to give performance reviews to. They have an answer for everything and are always pointing fingers in the other direction.” “Exactly,” Mike said. “And when they go off on their little tirade or pity party, what happens to the work atmosphere and production?” “It really is a big distraction. Nobody can focus very well on their work for a while,” said Dan. “It can take a lot of energy to get back on track after their ‘episode’ is over with.” “You know, with time and training, some of the middle group – the Benign Saboteurs,” Mike added, “could easily become Loyalists. Keeping that in mind...” He looked at Dan and Bev, making sure he had their attention, then slowly began, “What do you think would happen to production if we could identify, re-train, and improve the overall attitudes of Benign Saboteurs... and more importantly, remove the Terrorists?” “That’s a powerful thought,” Dan said, obviously thinking deeply. “I think it would dramatically improve our company’s performance, save tons of money, and it would be a much happier place to work, too.

We would definitely be able to meet our monthly production goals. “I definitely agree,” said Bev, “but is it really possible to be able to make this happen? Are we mostly dreaming here? How do we go about making this happen? What can we do to see such results here, and how soon can we start to see them?” “Well” Mike started... “Since the terrorists cause the most damage to both morale and to the bottom line, we need to identify them and work on them immediately. I believe some of them do not realize they are performing as a terrorist – at

least not in the way management sees it. Others know exactly what they are doing. So, once we identify them, we meet with them individually and explain our position. Then we put the pressure on them, give them a choice, and watch for their response – hopefully positive. We tell them that we want to hear their ideas – if those ideas are productive. But, they are on the watch list. This is their chance to either ‘get on board’ with this company, or we will give them the opportunity to seek employment elsewhere. And, they need to be given a definite – and short-time period to make the change, or they are gone.” Bev continued, “Removing some employees might also mean that we’d have to get some new ones. So we need to develop better screening and interviewing methods to make sure that we obtain more Loyalist types from the get go. That’s certainly going to take some fine-tuning of our recruiting processes in my department.” “Agreed. Now, that I’ve got your attention,” Mike declared, “let’s talk some more about how we can go about achieving this very goal. Basically, we want to turn this company around and put it on the map again through a leadership transformation effort – starting at the very top. Let’s make our competitors know that we are back in the running and we are not going to let them stand in our way.”

Dan added, “What we really need first is an assessment program to clearly identify the three types of employees; Loyalists, Benign Saboteurs, & Terrorists. This assessment should ideally take place across the whole company, starting at the top, because we have got to lead by example.” “I agree” stated Mike. “Once we eliminate the worst Terrorists, no matter where they are or what position they are in, we launch a team-building effort to create line of sight, what I’ll call – ‘Mission Alignment’ from the top of the organization all the way to the bottom.” “Agreed,” said Beverly & Dan in harmony. –“Let’s get to it...”

Taking your company to the next level in terms of performance and unity is what The Ropella Group is ready to show you how to do. If the problem identified in this paper sounds some-

thing like what you are currently experiencing in your organization, we invite you to talk to us. We are also available to show you how to make sure that your new hires are the Loyalists your corporation needs. We offer a free consultation without obligation. You can talk to Patrick Ropella at +1 850 983-4997, or email us at ropella@ropella.com.