

## “Know Your Employees”

by Markku Kauppinen

I am one of those individuals who feels going to a business networking event is almost like going to the gym. I often do not feel like going, but I never regret that I do. I always feel good afterwards.

At a recent such event, I was having sushi and a cold glass of Asahi and enjoying a conversation with a group of bankers in their mid to late twenties. They were relaxing after a busy day at the office and clearly having a good time sitting around the table and sharing the day's events and good gossip.

One of the young men soon remembered the business purpose of the occasion and began to tell me about the exciting financial services his bank could offer our business. He assured me that what clearly set his financial institution apart from the rest of his numerous competitors was the personalized service that we would receive.

“We put a tremendous amount of focus on understanding how our clients are unique and to being responsive to their different financial needs”, Jude told me with fake enthusiasm. I got the feeling that Jude was delivering this line for the twentieth time that day. While I thought that Jude could make a fine banker for our company, I was happy with our current bank and politely declined Jude's offer.

Jude seemed almost relieved and our conversation quickly turned casual. I told him that I used to work in the banking industry and understood many of the challenges Jude faced. Jude shared that he has been with the bank for almost two years. I asked how he enjoyed his work and the bank.

“I will not stay for much longer”, he replied with a more serious look on his face. “I do not want to continue spending my time there anymore. I want more from my work.”

I learned that Jude's employer had recruited him straight from a well-know business school. He had been a very good student and had received several job offers before graduating with an MBA

in Finance. Jude selected banking because the industry seemed to offer many options for him.

The bank put Jude through a one-year management training program that included structured classroom training and several 2 to 3 weeks stints at the different departments of the bank.

“I really got a lot of great training”, Jude commented. “After that year I had a very good understanding how the bank works and how the different parts of the firm fit together. It was a great year. Too bad it had to end.”

“So what changed after the management training?” I asked and offered Jude another bottle of Asahi from the open bar.

“It seemed like I went back in time about 20 years”, Jude replied. “I am now working for a manager who is completely out of touch with what is happening. He talks a great game, but never backs it up. The bank ties me down with a strict, 8 to 5, Monday through Friday schedule. They want me there whether I need to be there or not. I cannot continue like that. Life is too short. I know I am good and it will be easy to leave.”

In our extensive research over the past 10 years of how the employee populations shift around the world, one of the most striking findings is how the younger employees are changing. People who were born after 1980 are changing significantly in terms of their behavioral styles; they are quite different from the employees born earlier. This already has a significant impact on the organizations – just ask Jude’s employer how much they have invested in him and how much it will cost to lose him – and it is only going to get more significant as the talent gap increases.

The organizations that are winning the “war on talent” understand the changes in the overall talent pool. They also measure and understand how their own employees are changing and the implications that these changes have on the performance of the organization. They track the changes, analyze them and based on them,

make better decisions about how to attract and keep talent. It is because they know what attracts, motivates, and retains the talent.

I have talked to many HR professionals and managers who clearly understand that things are changing. But they are also not quite sure what the trends are beyond what everybody seems to know (e.g. desire for more personal freedom, less focus on a long career, etc.) and are clearly overwhelmed about what to do about these unknown trends. They are especially overwhelmed about how to assess their own employee shifts and make good decisions with the findings.

The good news is that it is not difficult (if you want to learn more how to do this, feel free to contact me):

- Assess the current employees or segments of the employee population.
- Map the results based on the different criteria such as age groups, job positions, etc. Cross tabulation is often needed to pinpoint the key issues. This is very easy to do if you have an assessment system that provides a database engine to perform organizational analysis.
- Understand, with the help of the analysis results, what employees styles succeed, fail or tend to leave.
- Use the information to effectively attract, motivate and maintain the best employees.

Why should you and your organization do this?

Just ask Jude – trust me, he will tell you.

Better yet, ask his former employer.

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## "Don't Worry, Be You"

by Marshall Goldsmith

Bill Jensen, who is a work-life philosopher, had a fascinating idea. He asked lots of people, including me, to write a letter to their loved ones expressing their views on what they thought was important in life. Bill then took 64 of these letters and turned them into the book *What Is Your Life's Work?: Answering the BIG Questions about What Really Matters...and Reawakening Your Passion for What You Do* (Collins, 2006). I decided to write a letter to my yet-to-be-born grandchildren that they could send to their grandchildren, long after I am dead. Following is my contribution to Bill's book.

Dear Yet-to-Be-Born Grandchildren,

Greetings from the past!

One of the greatest thinkers in my field (and in my time) was a man named Peter Drucker. I am very lucky. I got to spend a lot of time with Peter. He always encouraged people to ask, "Who is the customer?" before they do anything.

I finally understood the deeper importance of that question when Larissa MacFarquhar, a writer for the *New Yorker*, wrote a profile about me. Larissa spent two months traveling with me, and interviewing my family, my clients, and many of the people who work with me. She then wrote a long story and published it for 800,000 people to read. This was a little scary, since some of the *New Yorker* profiles can be pretty negative, and I didn't get to read it ahead of time.

I originally thought that my "customers" in doing this profile should be my clients—the people who pay me to do my work. I thought that maybe I should "be careful of what I say" and try to act appropriately. Maybe I should be careful not to embarrass anyone. But, as Larissa began to follow me around, I figured out who I really wanted to be my customers for this profile. It was you, my yet-to-be-born grandchildren. I decided that this profile was a special opportunity for you to get to know me.

I decided to just act like myself. If I had acted like someone who was too careful of what he said, it

would have been a story about an imaginary person. And not me. You might not have the chance to know your grandfather.

### *All For the Best*

Your grandmother and I discussed this, since she's in charge of our money. I told her to assume that we were going to lose \$150,000 in business because of this profile. I figured that by just acting like me, I might annoy someone who wouldn't want to work with me anymore. I figured that it would be worth the \$150,000 to have a brilliant writer spend two months on a story about me (that I could send to you, and hopefully, to your children—long after I am gone). I hoped that I wouldn't lose any more money than this!

As it turns out, I was glad that I just acted like me. I received approximately 300 e-mails about the profile. They almost all said the same thing: "The good news is: It sounds just like you. The bad news is: It sounds just like you!" My fears about losing business as a result of this profile were unfounded. Not only did I not lose any business, I was later interviewed in the *Harvard Business Review* and many other publications. I ended up with more clients—not fewer.

I learned something from this experience that I would like to share with you: Just be you. You are good enough. In the long run, any success you achieve, if you don't act like yourself, won't seem real anyway. You will just feel like an imposter or a phony.

### *Do What is in Your Heart*

In my career, I am sort of a pioneer. I was one of the original developers of something called 360-degree feedback. I help successful leaders achieve a positive, long-term change in their behavior. I also try to help the people I work with (and everyone around them) have a happier life.

If I look back on what I have contributed in my career, my largest contributions have all come from stuff I invented myself. No one can tell you how to do anything that hasn't been done before. If you are going to do anything creative, you

have to make it up yourself. There is no guidebook.

If you have an idea that sounds good to you, go for it. Just be you. Do what is in your heart. You may fail, but at least you will have tried. Don't waste your life worrying too much about being normal. Lots of people are normal. It is more fun to be different. Just be you.

When your grandchildren read the story of your life, make sure that it is really about you.

(I am grateful to Bill Jensen for allowing me to reproduce the letter in this column.)

***Dr. Marshall Goldsmith*** recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the *Business Week* best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.

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