

Staff Development Services

building strong businesses one employee at a time.

Happy Holidays

I know that this is a busy time of year for everyone but hope that you have just a few minutes to read this short but, hopefully, very informative e-letter that might help you in understanding and hiring employees.

Defensiveness. That is a word that we use in our coaching and hiring reports often because we see a lot of surveys that indicate the person is defensive. But just what does that term mean and how does it affect job performance?

The answer to that question is that defensiveness has a **huge** impact on job performance! According to Kathlyn Hendrics, Ph.D, a best-selling psychology author, "Defensiveness costs companies billions of dollars in productivity and results every year." In our reports, we usually refer to defensiveness when talking about someone who has very high self-esteem or, sometimes, low self-esteem. This defensiveness is related to how a person feels about himself or herself which is their **self-esteem**.

Self-esteem, like all other emotional character tendencies, is determined by a combination of genetics and environmental influences and, perhaps, even health issues. Very high self-esteem can be secondary to an upbringing by parents who provided only positive feedback resulting in someone who feels they can do no wrong. People with low self-esteem can appear to be defensive in an attempt to protect themselves but they are always aware of their shortcomings and open to improving their performance. Let's talk about the employee with very high self-esteem first.

You know this kind of person. This is the person that always has a reason why they are not at fault for anything that goes wrong - someone didn't give them the right information, their alarm clock malfunctioned, the stars and moon were out alignment - it is always someone or something else's fault. This is the person who has such high self-regard that they are unable to comprehend that they have any shortcomings or faults.

Now, if this person's work related character tendencies match the job requirements, then their defensiveness may not be much of a factor in his or her job performance. But consider this. Jane Doe #1 has very high self-esteem and very high consideration and work. She needs to feel helpful and to stay busy so she ends up taking on others' responsibilities instead of focusing on her own. Regardless of how many times her manager asks her to concentrate on just her tasks, she will always justify why she is helping someone else.

This Jane Doe may be very capable of performing the responsibilities of a job but would she be a good hire? Probably not because she would not listen to what she is being told and, therefore, would never change her behavior. Or, she would require so much supervision that she would take more effort than would be worthwhile.

Now let's consider Jane Doe #2 who has very high consideration and work but low self-esteem. How will her job performance differ from Jane Doe #1? She still has the need to take on others' responsibilities but the difference is how she responds to the criticism of her performance. Even though she may still become outwardly defensive, she realizes she is wrong and listens to what she is being told and then may make changes in her job performance. According to Dr. Hendricks, "The capacity for learning on the job is a critical factor in business success."

However, high self-esteem can actually be beneficial to job performance when the person is required to put himself or herself 'on the line' and can fail at their work because of factors that are outside their control. Attorneys, salespeople, surgeons, etc. need to 'protect their psyche' from those failures so that they can continue doing the job. But, for people in supportive type roles, high self-esteem is generally detrimental to job performance.

Best Regards,
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