

A Story of Helium and Sand

Who is *really* contributing to the forward thrust of your
Security Company?

Everyone is different. But, to twist a famous quotation, some are more different than others.

From the standpoint of an organisation, one of the key differences to focus on, of course, is *performance*.

By “performance”, we mean the ability of your people to do their job effectively and to produce the results that are required.

If Fred, the Installer, is pulling the cables and mounting the panels, sensors and cameras correctly, he’s simply doing his job.

But if he does this with a constantly high standard of quality, with no mistakes in the connections, and can do all this faster than other Installers, he’s definitely a “performer”.

On the other hand, if the Commissioning Technician consistently botches the job, he is a real pain. The Project Manager finds that he has to continually step in and make it work, or divert other resources to the job to patch it up.

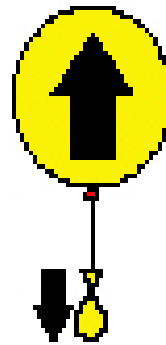
The employees in your organisation who produce the results they are supposed to achieve, in a consistent and timely manner, are not simply doing their job – they are directly contributing to the success of your organisation in a very positive manner. You should make an effort to recognise who they are. They are worth protecting.

The Balloon Theory

People, acting together in groups, should be moving in the same direction. Sadly, however, this is not always the case.

Take a simple analogy. Imagine each person in your organisation is a helium balloon with a sandbag hanging from it’s string.

The helium is forcing the balloon upwards. This represents the productive and positive aspects of that individual. It would include such things as their intelligence and knowledge, their drive and effectiveness, etc.



The sandbag represents those aspects of the person which are the weaker and more negative sides of their make-up. These are the things that will make it harder for them to really perform well. They could include flaws in their personality, lack of education, low ethic level or anything else that would drive any hard-working Security Manager to pull their hair out!

Nobody is perfect, of course. We all carry a little “sand” around with us. But some have more than others. And, some have more “helium” in their balloons than others do.

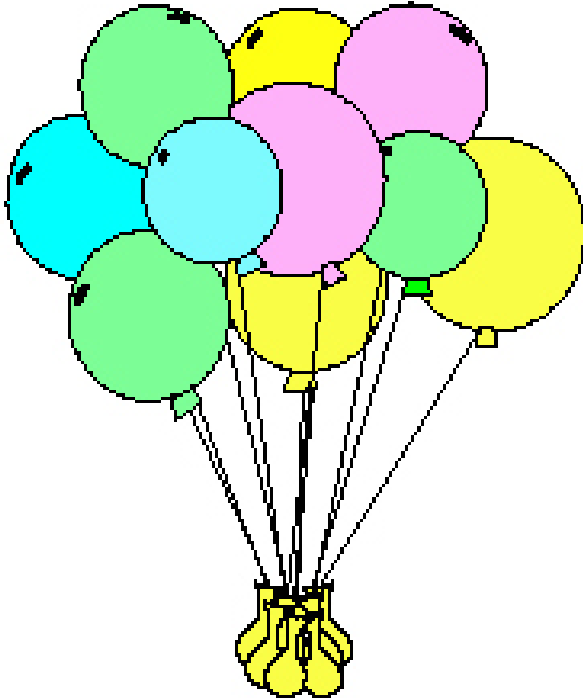
If you extend this concept, you can bind several balloons together so they form a cohesive group. That is now a picture of your organisation.

But an organisation, of course, is composed of individuals. So what is the make-up of each of these individuals? What is the relationship between the helium and sand in each case?

If an employee has much more “helium” than “sand”, they will move upwards, meaning they will be productive on the whole. If they have more

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sand than helium, they will not even lift from the ground, or, if already “airborne”, they will tend to drift downwards. These individuals have to be supported by the more effective “balloons” in your organisation.



As a manager, where do you spend most of your time? Well, it depends on your own specific operational environment, of course. But if you think about it, you probably spend very little of your management time on those people who get on with the job and produce consistently high results.

On the other hand, those employees who frequently botch it up, or produce substandard results, are the ones who drain your time and cause most of the heartache in your job. How much easier would your job be if you had a higher percentage of people who just got on with it and did not drag your attention away from other operational activities?

The *more individuals* you have in this cohesive group with a good endowment of “helium” (and with less “sand” than normal), the better off your

whole operation will be — an important factor when hiring.

Special Types of Balloons

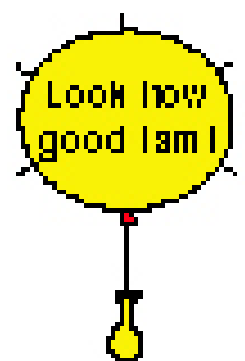
There is probably no-one who is totally status quo in this regard. In other words, you won't find balloons which have exactly the same force upwards, as downwards. You don't usually see helium balloons just hanging in mid air. They are either going up, or going down.

The truth is that each employee is either *helping* the forward progress of your organisation, or they are *impeding* it in some way.

The exception is the emotionally unstable person who goes up and down like a yo-yo. One day they can be extremely productive, and the next they will be apathetic and quite useless. This is a specialised problem, and there is a particular reason for this erratic behaviour.

Another specialised case is the balloon that *looks* terrific. It's all pumped up, and sometimes seems quite colourful. It's the person who *promotes* themselves as having almost no sand at all. They convince you of their worth by a false “public relations” front.

But if you hire such a person and tie them into the bunch with the rest of your “balloons”, you may find out later that they have these small, hard-to-detect needles on their outer surface. These hidden barbs will damage surrounding balloons so they lose their helium, reducing the power of the whole.



Did you ever find, from one year to the next, that you seem to be having much more trouble in your team? Chances are that you placed a new person in there who is actually bringing the others down.

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A Surprising Fact

The basic principle, of course, is that if you add a new balloon to the ones you already have, you want to make sure that it will be helping the whole system to rise. That means that you should not, for any reason, hire a “balloon” which has too much sand, or not enough helium. If you do, the effect will be to reduce the overall power of your organisation.

The surprising fact, however, is that the *reverse* of this concept is also true.

When you get rid of a balloon with more sand than helium, the whole system tends to move upwards, even if you do not replace the ineffective employee immediately!

Looking at the balloon theory, if you cut loose one sand-heavy balloon, the remaining group will move up.

This means that when you have a person who is *not contributing* to the team effort, and you take them out, your action will benefit the productivity of the remainder. Of course, if you can also replace that person with an *effective* employee, that will be even better.

Far too often, however, we hear comments along the lines of:

“I know that person is destructive, or nonproductive, but I have no-one to replace them, so we have to keep them on”.

This is like saying “I know this sand-ridden balloon drags the rest of the bunch down, but as long as I don’t have a replacement, I can’t afford to get rid of this extra weight”.

The fact is, you can *always* afford to get rid of dead weight. And when you do, the rest of the group will produce better results, even *before* you replace the nonproductive or destructive

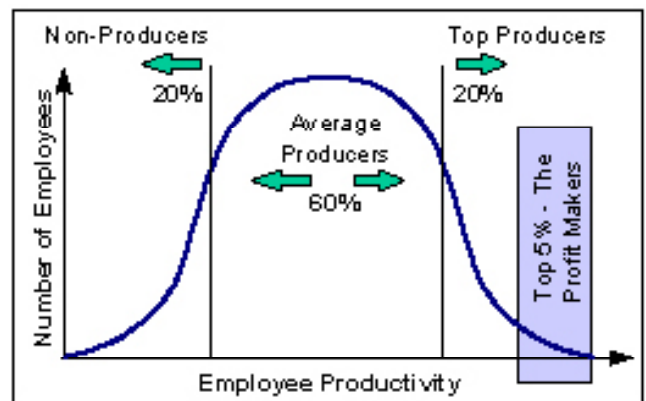
employee.

(A word of clarification here. We are not advocating that you rip through your organisation and immediately sack everyone who is not performing. Due process must occur, of course. But where you have identified someone who has legitimately qualified for off-loading, *do not then hesitate*, just because you do not have a replacement.)

Top Producers

Let’s look at the graph that represents the spread of productive people in your organisation - it follows the old 80/20 rule.

The top 20% of employees, *do* make a big difference to your organisation. Here we are looking at balloons with plenty of “helium” and very little sand. They really help to push the system far up into the “sky”. In addition to that,



they compensate for the “sandbags” who are not carrying their own weight.

Here you have the Service Technician who always gets it right. He’s the one you know you can rely on. If nobody else can fix it - he can. And he never causes any problems or demands any of your management time.

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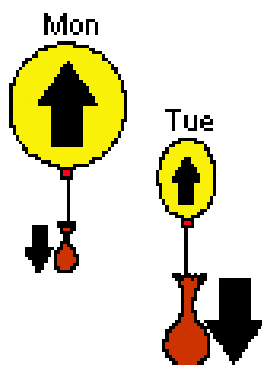
Average Producers

In the middle of the curve, you find the 60% who are average producers. Their productivity depends on how well the management handles them. You see, these balloons need to be “pumped up” from time to time, i.e. they need to be motivated. Top performers don’t need these extra shots of helium. They bring their own motivation with them to the job. In fact, the *job itself* is highly motivating to them.

If you have a sales force, this phenomenon is very obvious. Out of 5 or 6 Salespeople, one or two probably produce the bulk of your revenue. Do you need to spend any time with these top performers, encouraging them to do better? No! The ones you devote your time and effort to are the mediocre ones who show promise, perhaps, but who seem to require your attention each and every month to keep them firing.

Non-Producers

Then we have the least productive 20%. These mostly comprise the erratic performers who could also be called “ups and downs” balloons. Unlike Queensland’s weather, they are “good one day, dismal the next”.



The emotionally unstable employee

These ones are, at certain times, *really* pumped up. But the next day it seems that their sandbags have suddenly increased in weight! Such unpredictable people are the source of nearly all of the internal upsets and costly mistakes you experience. They are also the ones who take most of management’s time and attention.

They are usually easy to spot, however. Have you had a Service Tech who sometimes does an excellent job, but the next day

he never answers his phone and never returns calls? The client is complaining, but you can’t find the Tech!



Protect Your Most Valuable People

The balloons that are at the very peak of performance, as stated before, are the ones that demand very little of your attention. Beware, however, not to neglect them. You do so at the risk of losing them to one of your competitors. The main thing to watch out for is that *people who produce top results are subject to attack* by certain types of non-performers. If there is some sort of conflict going on, look at the performance level of the people involved and protect those who are actually producing good results.

Finally, if you could make sure you avoid hiring people in the lower bands of production, but at the same time put on a few more top performers, *you would actually move the entire 80/20 curve to the right*. This would give you a higher percentage of effective people! And that would be an extremely healthy result for your company’s profits, as well as for the general satisfaction and spirit of your whole organisation.