

Listen to Your Performers

Employees often try to sell you their ideas, and if it's one of your top performers doing the selling, you'd better listen!

As a manager, you have to make your own decisions about your operation.

But you can't always make decisions based entirely on your own personal data. Sometimes, you have to take input from others, and the question is: who to listen to. So, here is some input to consider on this question.

Look Who's Talking

Imagine you are a Sales Manager running a team of six or eight representatives. One rep is telling you their territory is too small and should be restructured to give them more potential to sell.

It may well be a valid suggestion — there are many factors to consider here. You could, for instance, go into a detailed analysis of the historical sales per customer, or sales per establishment. But that could be a lengthy exercise. Is it worth your time?

A fast way to get a pretty good first cut at this is to simply look at who is making the suggestion. Is it one of your star reps? Or is it a mediocre, or poor performer?

If the one making the suggestion has not produced good sales results for some time, they are most likely motivated to make this suggestion in an effort to camouflage their poor performance. You probably ought to look into this aspect first.

If, on the other hand, it's one of your best reps making the suggestion, you'd better sit up and take notice. Their motivation is much more likely to be a positive one. They have no axe to grind and no poor performance to justify.

If they are already getting good results from their current territory structure, chances are you have an opportunity to increase overall sales by looking further.

Poor Performer's Reason

A poor performer, by definition, can't see what the end result of their job is supposed to be. They look much more from the viewpoint of what **actions** they are doing, or (worse still) from the viewpoint of their supposed "**status**" and how important they think they are.

If that's where they are coming from, they are not looking from **your** viewpoint as the manager of the area.

You have your sights set on achieving the results of the team (be it a small group or the entire organisation). And that, of course, is the **only** viewpoint from which decisions relating to changing the operating basis should be made.

Sometimes, the suggestions may seem very plausible. But if they are made on a self-serving basis, rather than what's good for the whole group or team, they are fraught with danger.

The poor performer may simply be trying to get more of the action (or kudos) for themselves, without regard for the overall results. They are often just looking for yet another free ride.



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The Top Performer's Reason

When someone is really good at their job and consistently producing the results that are expected of them, you can bet their viewpoint is much more closely aligned with yours.

And, because they are usually closer to the action than you are, they become aware of things that you may not have had time to notice. If they are telling you something they feel could be an improvement, you can be certain they mean "improvement in results".

By contrast, the poor performer is more likely to be chasing "improvement in their personal status", or "less work and more reward".

Of course, you can have a top performer who is also very self-interested. They are not all "saints"! So don't assume that even a top performer's suggestions are totally valid. What you do know, however, is that what they propose will often lead to more results, because **that's what drives them.**

Take, for example, the very single-minded sales rep with a drive that would rival "The Terminator". They are hellbent on getting sales and stomp all over everything to make it happen. Great for sales results, but their focus may be just a tad too narrow to see the overall group picture clearly.

Watch out for Noise

When you become aware of conflicts or gripes, the same principle applies in doing a first-cut assessment.

If the person griping has no real results to show for their efforts, the noise could well represent an attempt to **pull a top performer down.**

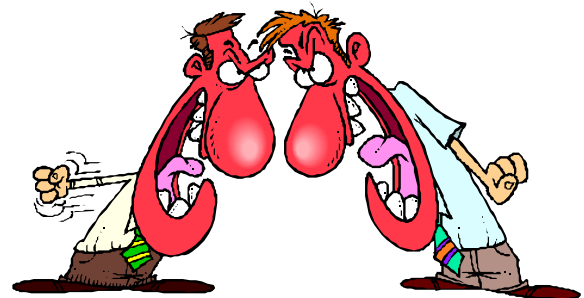
It is a sad fact that top performers get attacked. The smaller, less able people around them are apt to be jealous of their results or their recognition.

Pulling the top people down to their level is an insane effort to become the top dog themselves.

It doesn't enter their heads that they could achieve the same result (getting to the top) by improving **their own** performance. They opt, instead, for what they see as an "easy" solution: "Jim's top dog around here, so let me see how I can pull him down, then he'll be smaller than me and I'll be on top". The logic is not sensible, of course, but it happens.

So, when you hear of conflict amongst the troops, look first at protagonists involved and what their respective results have been. It may surprise you. And it will also make it easier to resolve the issues.

The one with a good record of performance is the one you should give most credence to. If they are being attacked by a person of much lesser performance, you should go to any length to protect that top performer. The liability is that,



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without such protection, your top performer may eventually leave you and move on to some other organisation.

Top performers who make noise and bluster are generally frustrated because **something is standing in the way of results**. Remember that your performer can see clearly what they need to achieve and, when stopped, they will naturally make a fuss.

1. It may be some administrative procedure or policy that is stopping them.
2. It may be another person in the organisation getting in their way.

In the first case, the fact that it is a top performer who is protesting the existing policy or procedure is reason enough to review that area. There may be good reasons **not** to change these things (because of broader ramifications), but if they are impeding performance, you should, at least, look at ways to clear a pathway for your performer to operate within — even to the extent of making a special exception for them.

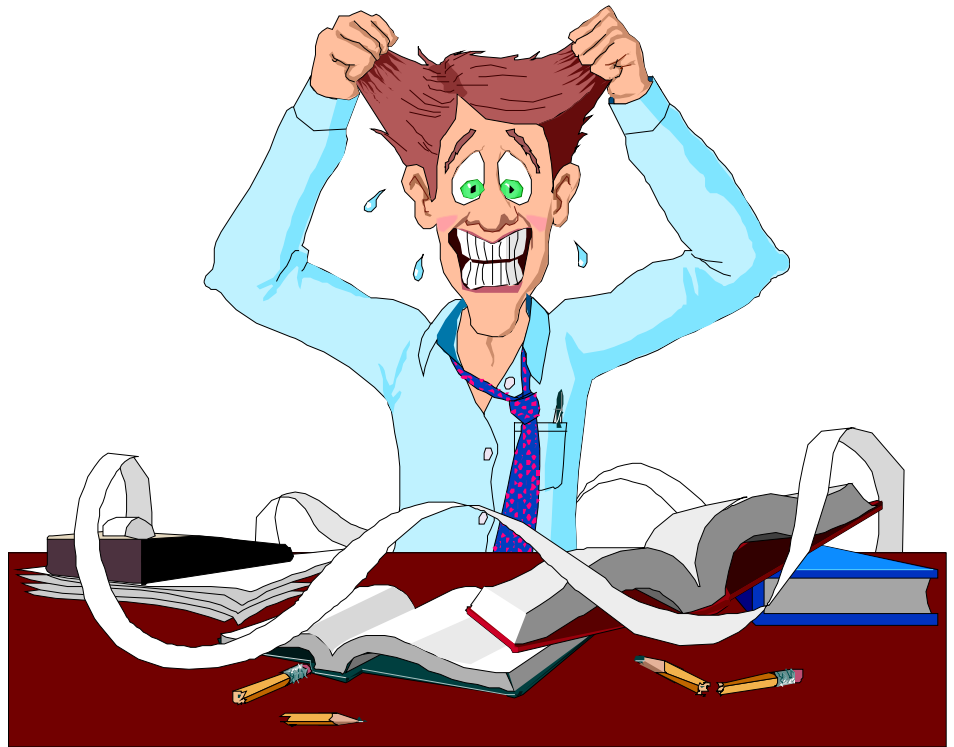
Top performers don't make noise for nothing. There is usually a valid (results-oriented) reason behind such racket.

In the second case, where it is another person in the organisation who is stopping the top performer, you need to assess the situation based on the results being achieved by the two parties. Is it a valid conflict that can be resolved sensibly, or is it a blatant attack on your top performer by some jealous rival?

Evaluating Input

With this approach of evaluating the performance level of your people, it becomes somewhat easier to sort out which way to jump.

And, if you decide in favour of the top performer, you generally can't go wrong.



Realise, however, that top performers are not infallible. So, don't be too "black and white" about this. This approach is intended to help with the initial assessment of the situation and to prevent unnecessary wheel spinning. You still have to make the decision which is right for the group.