



Gemini February Newsletter



I have recently been asked by a few clients who are moving their operations to Hong Kong about the local workforce, not so much as to how good and talented they may be, but more on the vital and urgent aspect as to corporate dress policy! We all knew that during the dot com boom, suits and formal attire were dispensed with replaced with polo necks or open collared shirts (god forbid!).

This trend lasted temporarily in Hong Kong, yet looking at the average office worker on the street in Hong Kong, you don't see that many ties or even suits as one used to. Even the Hong Kong SAR Government have been trying to remove the bow ties and other paraphernalia in an effort to remain 'green' and keep things cool in the office - thus a change in dress code. In Singapore, suits tend to be very cheap, as one never needs to buy the jacket to go with the trousers... it's just too hot to wear a jacket, and even note ties are becoming a thing of the past.

It does open up a very interesting debate on the general workplace dynamics from home working, flexible working hours, dress code and the bigger question on what the workplace will look like in the next five to ten years. As I have mentioned in a previous newsletter, Generation Y are looking for a lot more flexibility in what and how they work. For those of us born in a generation where suits, ties, cufflinks and a perfectly ironed shirt were the norm, we are now facing another challenge to our outdated thoughts on the workplace.

At least I do not work in one international investment bank, who recently wrote a 40-page manual on the correct way to dress, where it suggested employees wear skin-coloured underwear and avoid garlic breath. The manual was and still is poked fun at by other firms, and as such it has been cut down and edited. The interesting factoid that put a smile on my face was that in Russia, the bank advises employees to be prepared to hold your drink at business engagements and to "never reject an invitation to a sauna"!

On that note, I leave you with the rest of the newsletter.

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How to "Guarantee" You Won't Make a Bad Hire...



When most general managers fail to hit their goals, the problem can usually be traced back to hiring the wrong people.

The key is to hire for two factors: competence and values fit. If the person doesn't have both of these elements, *do not hire them under any circumstances*.

- **Hiring on look and feel** - It sounds silly that anyone would hire an executive based on the way they look and sound in an interview, but in my experience look and feel is the top criteria for most executive searches. When you combine a CEO that doesn't know what she wants and a board of directors that hasn't thought much about the hire, what do you think the criteria are?
- **Looking for someone out of central casting** - This is the moral equivalent of looking for the Platonic Form of a head of sales. You imagine what the perfect sales executive might be like then you attempt to match real-world candidates to your model. This is a really bad idea for several reasons. First, you are not hiring an abstract executive to work at an arbitrary company. You must hire the right person for your company at this particular point in time. Second, your imaginary model is almost certainly wrong. What is your basis for creating this model? Finally, it will be incredibly difficult to educate an interview team on such an abstract set of criteria. As a result, everybody will be looking for something different.
- **Valuing lack of weakness rather than strength** - The more experience you have, the more you realise that there is something seriously wrong with every employee in your company (including you). Literally, nobody is perfect. As a result, it is imperative that you hire for strength rather than lack of weakness. Everybody has weaknesses; they are just easier to find in some people. Hiring for lack of weakness just means that you'll optimise for pleasantness. Rather, you must figure out the strengths you require and find someone who is world class in those areas despite their weaknesses in other, less important domains.

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I would add two points on competence:

Do not, under any circumstances, hire for untapped potential

Most people develop only a small part of their abilities, and hiring for untapped potential is like buying land in the desert and waiting for oceans to arrive. It'll probably happen in a few million years, but not in time to help you now.

Make sure the person is "scary smart."

People can develop a lot of aspects of themselves, but IQ is not one of them. Unless the person has the mental horsepower, run!

How to deliver bad news...



Everyone in a leadership or management position has to deliver bad news from time to time. Occasionally, we have to deliver *really* bad news. It just comes with the territory.

While that's never fun or easy to deal with, I've found that it's rarely as scary as we make it out to be. It's the buildup in our minds and the rush to *get it over with* that often results in a negative outcome.

Examples of delivering bad news can cover :-

- Informing a member of staff that they are to be made redundant from a role they have held for many years.
- Telling a major customer that my company will fail to meet its delivery schedule of a key component, ultimately causing a shutdown of the customer's production line. More on this example later.
- Communicating a revenue shortfall, schedule slip, or other bad news to the Wall Street analyst community.
- Explaining to the world - through media interviews - that a product has a bug.

Four Steps to Deliver Bad News

Step One: Be Genuine. Be honest with yourself about the role you personally played in the outcome. This is critical because, if you played a direct role, i.e. you screwed up, you need to be straight with yourself about that or you'll end up feeling guilty and weird and that will come across negatively. In other words, you need to diffuse your own emotional state.

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Thought for the month

Airline travel is hours of boredom interrupted by moments of stark terror.

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Step Two: Be Empathetic. Put yourself in the other person or people's shoes. I really mean that; give it some time and really get in there. Try your best to understand what they stand to lose as a result of the bad news. Make sure you're clear that, regardless of your personal role in causing the problem, you are, to the other party, responsible and accountable.

Step Three: Plan. Consider all the ways you can make the situation right. In the case of a major delivery issue to a customer, communicating a product bug, or equally significant event, that may require one or more internal pre-meetings. In any case, you need to have a clear picture of the options at your disposal and under exactly what conditions you and your company are willing to bring them to bear on the problem.

Step Four: The Delivery. Now, and only now, are you ready to deliver the bad news in real time. If you did the first three steps right, your emotional state will be clear. That means you'll be empathetic but not emotionally distraught, freeing your conscious mind to make clear-headed decisions in real time. And depending on the reaction, you have an arsenal of possibilities to offer to help make things right.

Here's a good example of the time that my company (I was head of sales) couldn't deliver a key component on time, resulting in a shut down of my customer's production line.

During the "bad news delivery" face-to-face meeting with the customer, we held a conference call with my company's head of operations who, seemingly on the fly and under pressure from the customer, committed to an accelerated schedule that would minimize my customer's pain.

That was a preplanned contingency to use if necessary. The result was a customer who felt that 1) I would do anything to go to bat for him, 2) my company would pull out all the stops to meet his needs, and 3) he helped to make all that happen by the way he handled the meeting. We all won and our relationship was stronger as a result.

Bottom line. The biggest mistake people make in delivering bad news is the emotional build up and the unnecessary rush to get it over with. They typically don't take the time to 1) diffuse their own emotional state, 2) put themselves in the other person's shoes, and 3) do enough contingency planning to know what can be done to make things right and under what conditions to offer them.

If you follow these four steps, you'll minimize the negative impact and, at times, even come out ahead.

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