

Declarations of Independence – Developing an Autonomous Staff

Imagine the following scenario: You're the manager of a rapidly-expanding, internet-based company with a staff comprised of writers, salespeople, programmers, designers, and various administrative and support personnel. Every person under your supervision is equipped with a high level of expertise. They're smart. They're motivated. They're dedicated. They dress snazzy and never leave the pot of coffee in the kitchen empty. Your company operates so smoothly, your only concerns are whether to use your growing profits to buy a foosball table for the staff break room, or an air hockey table.

This scenario may strike you as a feverish pipe dream. And in most companies, creating a staff and system that works like a well-oiled machine is nearly impossible. All employees have their own strengths and weaknesses, and will experience varying degrees of highs and lows in their performance and motivation throughout their careers. However, even if your desire to create a perfectly autonomous staff is only half-baked, building a work force that is independent to some degree, at least in terms of your supervisory staff, does have its benefits.

There are many advantages to hiring an employee who is autonomous and who can work relatively unsupervised. Aside



from the fact that you can trust this person to put in a good day's work and to be able to hold his/her own if you're absent, a sufficiently trained, autonomous employee is more likely to feel empowered. He won't hesitate to make decisions without you. She won't second-guess the desire to take initiative on a new project. This means that you, as manager, can spend less time "handholding", and more time on strategic planning for the organization, which can also positively impact your bottom line. Autonomous employees empowered to take responsibility are much more motivated to give their all – and will do so.

The problem is that developing autonomy is mountainous challenge that not all managers want to climb. Hiring and training staff to be adequately skilled and independent requires time and money. That slight twinge of doubt before delegating an important task to someone is hard to ignore, as is that cliché about mice playing while the cat is away. Let's face it – some employees need and probably thrive on continuous supervision. They want that sense of structure and the knowledge that they can turn to you for guidance. This doesn't mean all employees will be like this, however. The vast majority of employees will respond positively to greater autonomy, and the sense of empowerment derived from it will serve to increase their potential in the company. Self-reliance and a sense of control over daily activities almost always provide a boost to a person's self-esteem and, in turn, will promote a desire for more of the same. The key is to find someone who has that autonomous streak. Someone who is willing to take on the responsibility that comes with self-reliance and initiative, and who doesn't shy away from challenge.

There are several key personality traits that are important to seek out when deciding which employees are more likely to be autonomous. These include:

- ❖ Honesty and integrity
- ❖ Loyalty and commitment
- ❖ Goal-orientation

- ❖ Flexibility
- ❖ A sense of responsibility/accountability
- ❖ The ability to stay organized, manage time efficiently, and prioritize
- ❖ The ability to problem-solve independently, but to also recognize when assistance is needed
- ❖ The ability to improvise and think on one's feet
- ❖ The capacity to perform under pressure

An individual who has these characteristics will likely be a better fit for a position that does not require close supervision. This isn't a pipe dream. But to find this type of employee, you need to do some digging, and delve deep into a person's psyche. This requires:

- ❖ Screening for the desired personality traits during the hiring process.
- ❖ Asking references for examples of when the candidate displayed your desired behaviors. Has this person ever worked unsupervised? What was the result? How often did this person take initiative? What happened when you delegated more responsibility to this person?
- ❖ Management by objectives – this means that you, as manager, need to be goal-orientated in designing tasks and the requirements needed to complete them, including specification and a reasonable timeframe.
- ❖ Setting periodic check-in times to track progress and troubleshoot.

- ❖ Developing a system of rewards and corrective measures.
- ❖ An open-door policy with regards to feedback and guidance.

Not every person or organization can adapt to having less supervision. For those who can, the financial benefits as well as the positive atmosphere that can be created are far-reaching. Increased autonomy and a self-reliant workforce are achievable goals that any company can strive for and benefit from, and PsychTests makes it easy for you to take the first step toward making this happen. With **ARCH Profile** assessments like **WINT (Work Integrity Test)** and the **EAPT (Employee Attitude and Personality Test)**, you can start hiring and developing staff that is willing to take responsibility and become a part of your well-oiled machine. And you may even get to add both the foosball and air hockey table too. 🎱

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