

Auto Industrious

Imagine the following scenario if you will. You're the owner/manager of a rapidly expanding internet-based company with a staff of some thirty employees comprised of a sales department, programmers, designers, and assorted administrative and support personnel. Every person under your supervision is equipped with such a high level of expertise, motivation, dedication and self-reliance that they require little to no supervision and as a result, your company is able to operate smoothly and flourish. Your only concerns are what to do with your growing profits! Does this scenario strike you as a work of pure fantasy or an owner's feverish pipe dream? Well to be honest, it almost certainly is. There is no perfect-employee pool or foolproof method of ensuring that we always hire the absolute best. 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, accepting that the fantasy of a completely autonomous staff is an improbability if not impossibility does not mean that we should not strive to achieve the goal of maximum self-reliance. Even if only partially successful, an autonomous work force to any degree provides benefits to your organization.

There are many advantages to hiring an employee who is autonomous and can work relatively unsupervised. Once sufficiently trained, such an employee is more likely to perform quality work consistently, with fewer problems. Fewer problems mean higher efficiency and more cost-effectiveness. The manager can spend more time on strategic planning for the organization rather than handholding the employees, which can also positively impact an organization's bottom line. This empowers the employees, and the feeling of responsibility motivates them to give it their best.

Companies can also take advantage of cost-saving technologies, when feasible, by allowing a portion of their workforce to work remotely from a home office, which can impact the over-head cost. The environmental repercussions are also a consideration, and so is the cost of transportation.

Some owners/managers may be concerned about leaving employees unsupervised, as they fear that their workers will take advantage of the lack of supervision. The old adage "while the cat is away, the mice will play" seems to drive the decisions of many managers or supervisors. This is indeed a valid concern, as there are some people who do take advantage of a lax supervision. In addition, some employees simply require greater supervision because they lack the ability to self-monitor. While they may be conscientious and truly have the company's best interests at heart, they simply do not possess the personality traits required to work autonomously. On the other hand, many employees are eager to please, to work hard, and to do a good job. Motivation for doing so may vary. Some may want to get ahead and are looking for a promotion. Some may want to keep a secure position in a tough job market and can't afford to lose the job

they have. Others may simply be driven by feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction with a job well done. Regardless of their personal motivation, the vast majority of employees will respond positively to having greater autonomy in their jobs, and the sense of empowerment derived from it will serve to increase their potential in this area. Self-reliance and a sense of control over our daily activities almost always provides a boost to one's self-esteem and, in turn, will promote a desire for more of the same, which will prove advantageous to both the employee and his/her employer.

So how does an organization reap the benefits of employees who require less supervision? Several key personality traits are important when deciding which employees are more likely to work successfully while unsupervised. These include:

- honesty and integrity
- loyalty
- a sense of responsibility/accountability
- the ability to organize time and prioritize
- the ability to recognize when they need assistance with something
- goal-orientation
- maturity
- the ability to improvise and think on one's feet
- the capacity to perform under pressure
- flexibility

Any individual who has these characteristics will likely be a better fit for a position that does not require close supervision. Some tips on making this work are below:

- Screen for the desired personality traits during the hiring process.
- Ask references whether the employee could work autonomously and how they performed when they were unsupervised.
- Manage by objectives - be goal-orientated in designing tasks and requirements and create reasonable timeframes for the completion of a project.
- Set periodic check-in times to track progress and troubleshoot, and most importantly, be very clear about what the results should be.
- Develop a system of rewards and corrective measures. Focus on the successes of an employee and provide incentives and rewards for performing well without supervision. However, provide ample feedback for good and bad performance and use disciplinary steps if needed.
- Be willing to offer fair and competitive financial compensation and offer flexibility in benefits for those capable of working unsupervised.
- Have an open-door policy with regards to feedback and guidance.

Not every person or organization can adapt to having less supervision, but for those who can, the financial benefits as well as the positive atmosphere that can be created are



extensive. Not every position should be unsupervised either, and an organization needs to select the positions that are amenable to this kind of arrangement, and those that require continuous monitoring.

While the fantasy scenario of the completely autonomous workplace may be an improbable case of wishful thinking, increased autonomy and a self-reliant workforce are certainly achievable goals that any company, including yours, can strive for and benefit from.