



Selection Processes and High-Performance Work Systems One Way to Get What You Really Need – The Blood Oath Partnership Part 2

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To create a High Performance Work System, you must have a High Performance team, and if you want a High Performance work team, then you must have High Performance individuals. This is axiomatic. It is a truism. It just is.

The whole really is greater than the sum of the parts. A Work System is about the Work Team. If a High Performance Work System is the goal then you will have to have a selection process – somewhere, somehow there will be a sorting out of who goes where. This is also axiomatic. It is also a truism. It also just is.

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One way to get the right mix of the right people, into the right positions, is the “Blood Oath Partnership”. This is a high risk, high return option that requires an unbreakable partnership between Manufacturing, Organizational Effectiveness, Human Resources, Labor Relations and Legal. Think of Clint Eastwood and Ten Bears in the classic western The Outlaw Josey Wales. They swore a blood oath. Their pact was irrevocable. Their bond was based on deeds and not words.

A successfully designed and implemented selection process requires disparate corporate and field groups to create a partnership unlike any of these groups have ever experienced. These functions must be wedded at the hip and understand each other so well they can finish each other’s sentences. Each party must sign in blood, a sworn oath to never give up, give in, or throw anybody underneath the bus. Everyone must behave as if it is the team against everyone else and everyone else will never win.

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Unless you are already a part of a mature High Performing Work System then make no mistake, there will be 800 calls to Corporate Headquarters. In a union setting there will likely be National Labor Relations Board charges filed. There will most likely be disparate impact law suits. There will be unbelievably brutal and ugly things said about Leadership. There will be unbelievably brutal and ugly things said about hourly employees that choose change and the future, and take a wild leap of faith by trusting Leadership. There will be hesitation on the part of various groups as the pressure escalates and the noise and ugliness mount. Make no mistake the noise and ugliness will happen.



A painful lesson repeatedly relearned from multiple experiences is that it is excruciatingly difficult for an organization's Leadership to understand and believe in the reality of the noise and ugliness that will ensue. The next time I am asked about Selection Processes, I will pound on a conference room table until I have made enough of a racket to make sure that everyone knows what is in store for them as the Selection Process is designed and implemented! Do not even start to walk down this path if you are not ready, willing and able to deal with full on, in your face confrontations, arguments and fights. Your good intentions are not sufficient. Your business knowledge of the competitive landscape and what must be done to survive is not enough. Your skill at project management and engineering is literally irrelevant.

What you must have is courage!

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You will have to cope with the reality that some people get into the new system and some people will not. The current cultural mindset of everyone gets a blue ribbon, that dodge ball is a dangerously competitive game, and everyone can be a part of the team does not work in creating a High Performance Work Team. The stark truth is there are employees that make the cut and there are employees that do not. This reality will test your organization in unimaginable ways, perhaps all the way to the breaking point.

Those that do not make the cut are absolutely not "bad" people. It is often the case that the transition from the old system to the new system demands that you rely on the non-selected members of the workforce. However, High Performance Work teams require very specific entrepreneurial skills and interpersonal maturity. It goes way beyond technical competency. It goes way beyond showing up for work and "just" doing your job.

Stay the course and there is a better tomorrow. Stay the course and most people in the facility will think that for the first time in their lives leadership had the courage to do what is right and should have been doing all along. If you ask opinion leaders, they will tell you that you got it mostly right, those included and those excluded. The current workers already know who the ones that fit are. They also know who does not fit. They know because every day for months and usually years these employees have worked in close proximity with each other. They already know.

They know who has the right stuff and those who cannot make the grade. In many cases they are and have been waiting for you, Leadership, to act in what is the best interests of the business. They want you to do what you should have been doing anyways. Evaluate individual and team effectiveness, fairly, effectively and repeatedly. They may not say it out loud, but at the core they know it is in their own self-interest to be a part of a High Performance Work Team.





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A results-oriented organizational effectiveness practitioner, with over 35 years of hands on experience in designing and implementing sustainable work system/cultural change initiatives. Intellectually knowledgeable enough to know what might work. Experienced enough to know what will work. Have coached and mentored leadership, from Front Line Supervisors to Superintendents to VPs. Have a real knack for quickly establishing, strong trust-based relationships.

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