

BE PRUDENT WHEN REASSIGNING YOUR TOP WORKERS

By Aldonna R. Ambler, CMC, CSP, The Growth Strategist™

Growing companies do need to have employees who can be flexible, respond to needs and be willing to learn. However, in many companies the tendency to move people around goes too far.

It's often the company's most talented, loyal people who get moved around the most. They don't complain. They understand the reasons behind the changes. Their experience could help ease the trauma for others. Sadly, this tendency can undermine the experienced person's authority, can greatly reduce his/her contributions and lead to some capable people burning out.

I have seen several examples of this recently. In one case a manager in a firm had been in six key roles within the past two years. Jim was assumed to be an acting or interim manager. By the sixth move, when he was in what was to be his long-term assignment, Jim felt forced out and left disappointed.

He felt used up and discarded. It has been very difficult for Jim to look for another position. The situation left him feeling confused and stranded. The business owner was not intentionally creating a confused, bitter, burned-out manager. He was trying to respond to the demands of the growing business through the use of available resources. That is little consolation to Jim.

How does the game of playing musical chairs with key people develop? Growing companies typically face increasing demands, constant change and limited resources. Many are started with a person or a few key people who have very broad-based jobs at first.

Highly trained people work in jobs for which they are clearly overqualified in order to get companies off the ground. So the first time a need is identified or an exciting opportunity

is available, everyone typically wants to give the loyal generalist, who has paid his/her dues, the chance. He/she is probably due for a change and a reward.

A problem typically cues the possibility of a second job transfer. It seems logical to ask an experienced person to address the issue. That way the business saves the money that would be needed to train a new person and the problem will be addressed in a manner that will make everyone comfortable. The problem will feel less threatening if suggested solutions come from a familiar face.

Now there has been a pattern established. This is the person who can handle challenges and accept change. Who do you think will come to mind the next time a major problem comes up? There has been a

de-facto career change. A person who was first hired for his/her technical expertise has become the company's troubleshooter/internal consultant. If the individual did not aspire to a career in interim or short-term project management, this scenario is destined to lead to dissatisfaction, dysfunction or conflict. After a while, other employees can't tell whether the manager is being moved around because he/she is good, incompetent or doesn't fit in anymore.

So where do growing companies go wrong and are there other options? There are alternatives to each of the conclusions reached in the scenario:

- Rewarding an employee for the time he/she has put in is only one criterion for a new assignment. Is the position available within the career goals of the individual? Does the person have the needed skills? Would the person be selected for the position if he/she had not been an existing employee and had to compete for the job with other applicants?

In many companies the tendency to move people around goes too far.

- Saving money on new employee orientation is not the only criterion for assignment of a person to a problem-solving task. Could a new person work with an existing employee to get the best of both?
- The fact that a key person has been good at something does not necessarily mean that he/she should be asked or expected to do it again. Because the experienced manager was helpful and addressed a problem doesn't mean he/she wants to do it again.

It's important to address problems, capitalize on opportunities and value experience, but it is equally important to keep career goals of key people in mind, limit the changes in the organizational chart and risk infusion of new ideas.

To test whether you have made too many changes in key positions, ask your employees to list everyone's title. Decide which roles are the most confusing or cause nervous laughter. You can also interview your top people to see if they still have a sense of their career goals.

*Known as **The Growth Strategist™**, Aldonna R. Ambler, CMC, CSP helps professional service firms, technology-driven businesses, and construction-related product/service for distribution companies reach their goal of **Achieving Accelerated Growth With Sustained Profitability®** through a combination of speaking, consulting, executive coaching, authorship, and growth financing. She has executed an ESOP, grown multiple international businesses, won multiple awards, provided expert testimony on economic growth at over 30 legislative hearings, conferred with Presidents in the Oval Office, has written over 100 articles and plans to publish "Four Entrepreneurial Styles" this fall. Aldonna was named the **national (USA) "Woman Business Owner of the Year"** and one of **NJ's Best 50 Women in Business**. She currently hosts a weekly Internet radio show, **The Growth Strategist™** on VoiceAmerica® Business (www.business.voiceamerica.com) every Tuesday at 11 a.m. ET. Aldonna Ambler can be reached at Aldonna@AMBLER.com, 1-888-ALDONNA (253-6662) or at www.TheGrowthStrategist.com.*

