

Hunters Vs. Meateaters



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There is a lot of talk these days about developing high growth companies with high performance people who can compete in the global marketplace. There is also lots of discussion about how we will recruit and train the highly skilled manufacturing employee of the future.

But I'd like to talk about the so-called "high performance employees." In my opinion, these are people who are motivated to excel at everything they do. They like challenges, new opportunities, and could be called "driven" people. They always seem to be in the middle of the problems and solutions and are seen as invaluable for many reasons. I call these people "Hunters."

Every company owner or manager can tell you who the Hunters are because they stand out, and seem to make things happen no matter what the circumstances. Hunters are easy to identify in a company because there are so few of them— but they can make a huge difference in company performance because of their drive.

Their counterparts in the organization are the average employee, who I refer to as "Meateaters." This is not a disrespectful term; we need Meateaters to do many of the jobs in a corporation, and they are good employees too. They do their jobs, always play by the rules, do not take risks, and are good conformers to the company culture. These people are the 8 to 5 group who need a job, but their jobs are not the most important thing in their life. I think that Meateaters are hired

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because they are safe, will conform to all of the rules, and do not appear to be troublemakers. We need the Meateaters along with Hunters, but the critical factor is the ratio between the two groups.

Identifying Hunters

Finding more meaning or satisfaction in work is a key point in defining Hunters. Since we have to work most of our waking hours, I think that making a job more meaningful is extremely important. This pursuit is probably different for every person, but for most Hunters I have met, their goal is always about doing things that are interesting and meaningful. The more new ideas they can find or invent in work, the happier they are. And, of course, if Hunters can combine their interests and skills with their work, they can bring real meaning and enjoyment to their careers.

There are many workers and managers that are driven to succeed because of monetary rewards, status, or stock prices, but many Hunters are motivated by a desire to achieve for the sake of achievement.

Retaining Hunters

If you have a good Hunter as an employee, the question is, how do you keep them in the company?

Allow them to take risks: It is the motivated and self-confident Hunter who is willing to take the risks needed to get things done and create new methods and new products. Many SMMs (small and mid-size manufacturers) are going to have to take more risks— not fewer— to survive in the new economy. You can't issue proclamations about risk to the employees— your work must match your talk. If you want to retain Hunter employees you must allow them to take risks; the best leaders do this by setting the example.

Change the organization: In his book, *Maverick*, Ricardo Semler, knowingly or unknowingly, tried to create an organization where employees had the chance to excel. He came to believe that the true driver of productivity was motivation and genuine interest, not predetermined routines and tight job descriptions. Semler wanted to provide the conditions that would motivate employees to give their all, but also knew that he couldn't allow the performers to do their best unless he changed the organization. According to Semler, he wanted his people to have more contact with one another. He wanted less clutter, fewer levels, more flexibility— basically, a new shape for the organizations. So Semler scrapped the Pyramid organization and reorganized the company into smaller units. As a matter of fact, he abandoned all organization charts. Says Semler, "by breaking the company down into smaller units it made the employees feel human again, feel involved, feel that they belong." He adds, "Even the most cynical observers were astonished to find that things were better off once we got rid of the pyramid and all its rungs and roles."

Show empathy: Empathy is defined as the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people. Empathy is important for building teams, which are an essential part of the decentralized organization. Teams are always composed of

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people who have different agendas, emotions, needs, and views, but they still have to work together and make consensus decisions. It is essential that the leader understand the emotional make-up of the people to achieve team goals. Empathy is also necessary to retain the talented Hunters. Retaining Hunters must be a high priority of the leader because it costs too much to replace them. It takes skills in coaching, mentoring, and empathy to be able to retain hunters.

Hiring Hunters

Hiring Hunters takes an open-minded leader. Progressive manufacturers always seem to attract more than their fair share of the best people with the right skills, and these managers are not afraid to hire employees capable of replacing them (unlike the bureaucratic manager hiring someone who won't be a threat). This is another problem for many SMMs (small and mid-size manufacturers) who tend to hire people who fit into their comfort zones rather than a high performance Hunter who will probably make waves getting the job done. In this new era of continuous change, a high performance person— one who is not afraid to fail and will always push the organization and challenge the rules— is an asset.

Improving the ratio of Hunters to Meateaters requires an open-minded leader who can function as a change agent and focus on hiring performers rather than conformers. It will take a leader who takes risks and wants to do things that really make a difference.

Mike Collins is the author of Saving American Manufacturing, a comprehensive step-by-step strategy that demonstrates how to ultimately become an organization that will continually find new opportunities in today's fast-changing global environment.

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