# Chapter 13:    But, But, But…

*"...we do not prune dead trees to make them fruitful, nor those which are planted in a desert; but such as belong to the garden, and possess life."*

*Arrowsmith[1]*

Having read this far, you might be thinking, "In a perfect world maybe this could work, but..." Despite your concerns, which may certainly be valid, there is no doubt that this approach can help you achieve your goals. However, this approach will not work with every employee. It is not due to the approach, but due to the fact that some employees have made choices for themselves that no matter what the business structure may be they are not the right fit.

## RELEASE INCONGRUENT INDIVIDUALS

These individuals are the ones that do not wish to be working within the organization in the first place. They are the ones who have internal issues that would stand in the way of the work performance no matter what tools and support they are given. And they are the ones that can have an energetically negative impact on your organizational progress.

One thing many of us recognize about life is that each individual has to make his or her own decisions about their actions and their future. Many have proven that no matter how much you may try to help or support them, you cannot change their behavior or choices if they don't want to. These individuals must be allowed the freedom to live their own lives and choices, but not within your organization. Therefore, it will be necessary to release individuals that are not the right fit for your organization.

However, the approach to the separation process is just as important as the components previously outlined. Remember, your communication must always be in alignment with the philosophy of 'you are just as important as I am; your goals are just as important as mine.' You can take this position and still do what is in the company's best interest. It's really about not having any judgment about the individual's choice, yet acknowledging that his or her employment within your company is not in the company's best interest, and then communicating honestly to the individual that he or she is not the right fit.

While this communicates good will to the individual being terminated, it is just as important for the employees who remain. Employees watch every action of management and executives and form opinions based on actions that they see and not on what they are told. If in any action you show a lack of concern for any individual, employees come to believe that that is who you truly are and not the 'gazillion' good actions you may have demonstrated in the past. Since this model is based on the premise that employees are just as important to the organization as its executives, it is imperative that this point is not taken lightly and that care is taken when terminating employees.

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[1] *Quote Source: http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/topics/resignation_t001.htm*

Some may feel that this is difficult to do. While I could only give specific suggestions if I knew each company's situation, I can relate an experience I had to demonstrate this approach. While working for a large chain, I was asked to lay off nine individuals from a particular department—with good reason I might add. However, despite the validity of the decision, we were located in a jurisdiction that had very strict labor laws. The government required companies to receive government approvals prior to any layoffs. The alternative was getting the employees to agree to be terminated.

So my challenge became to get nine people to agree to end their employment. The first thing I had to do was come up with a convincing argument as to why this was in their best interest—remember, individuals act in their own best interest—and at the end of the day I did. I strategized on the order of the meetings that I needed to have with each of them to prevent any undue influence on each other; I saw two best friends at the same time so I could watch and control how they influenced each other; and I saw the two most difficult employees last (separately) hoping that everyone else had left the property and they would not have access to the others once they learned of their own fate. The result: Seven initially agreed to accept the termination and final pay, and two did not—naturally the two I met with last. While the process following the initial meetings got difficult and complicated (because the two dissenters contacted the others and convinced them to file a complaint with the Labor Department), in the end they all eventually accepted the payout and termination without the company requiring Labor Department approval.

There were several reasons why this worked—albeit a circuitous route to the final result. At the core was the approach that was taken. I had decided that I needed to 'make it about them'—in a good way. I didn't tell them the department was being downsized because "you were ineffective, corrupt, and we have evidence of underhanded dealings;" although all of this was true. My goal was to get them to agree to the termination so there would not be a long drawn out fight at the Department of Labor. It was not about 'pay back'; it was about achieving the goal.

I focused on communicating that 'the company cared about them' and wanted what was in their best interest, which it was not able to deliver on any more. The action that made this appear as sincere and not just espoused was the additional payout given beyond what was required by law. Yes, this did cost the company some additional money but not half as much as it would have cost if the matter went before the Labor Department and attorney fees were involved.

My point is as stated before. People are human beings. They want to be respected, appreciated, and considered important. You are far more likely to get cooperation of whatever kind is necessary whenever you treat individuals from this perspective.

It is very important to note, however, that there is a distinct difference between an employee with no ambition and an employee with no desire to be productive. Low ambition does not equate to low performance or lack of motivation. That is why it is key to ensure that each employee has the necessary tools and support and is given every opportunity to succeed at their job function. Not every poor performance is reflective of the individual's lack of desire to be productive. Each case of poor performance must be assessed individually to determine its cause.

It may not easily become clear to you what the challenges are, so it is necessary to assess all of the components related to the job function. If you have the distinct impression that a particular worker is a good worker but is demonstrating low performance, check out the systems, processes, and structure. If the problem is not in any of these components, review the individual's skill set and knowledge base. Also, ensure that the individual is not a square peg

being forced into a round hole. If this is not the challenge, then it must be a motivation issue. If the company is doing its part to motivate individuals—as outlined in this model—then the challenge is internal. It could be personality conflicts at work that are negatively impacting the individual, or it could be challenges outside of work that are affecting job performance.

While it is a wise company policy to not become involved in the personal lives of employees, providing a listening ear can go a long way in improving the state of mind of individuals with challenges even though you are not resolving their challenges. Being able to express oneself and 'get it off your chest' is helpful in moving past challenges. So listening can be helpful. Nevertheless, it is expected that these are occasional challenges that one is lending support for and not challenges that are having long term affect on work performance.

The bottom line is to be clear on which employees can fit into this model where both the company and the individual can be partners and benefit; and also be clear on which employees cannot assist your organization and vice versa—always without judgment.