

# The Quick and Dirty Dozen for Managing People

## By Monroe Porter

Unfortunately, there are no directions that fall out of the womb with a newborn child, and most of us learn to be good parents through trial and error. Managing people is much the same. When you hire or promote your first foreman, salesperson and office administrator, there were no directions with that addition. Learning to be a trial-and-error manager can be quite expensive and, unlike parenting, you may not have your parents or friends to turn to for guidelines. I have taken time to offer some founding principles and guidelines that can help you through this process.

**1. Employee Mentality vs. Owner Mentality:** Don't confuse employee mentality with owner mentality. Your employees are employees, not business owners. They don't think like you. However, you can train them to improve their thinking and be cognitive of what their job success would look like. As frustrating as it may be, they are never going to be you.

**2. Hire work ethic, teach skill:** Many of your employee frustrations revolve around work ethic issues such as tardiness, haphazardness, poor attitudes, etc. Attitude and work ethic tend to be developmental values our parents teach us. Most of these skills are ingrained into people prior to their teen years. Look for stability and attitude when hiring.

**3. Structure is a good thing:** Folks sometimes confuse structure with the military or government environments where everything must be done by the rules and inefficiency blossoms. Intelligent structure is a good thing and helps performance. It helps folks stay organized and results in fewer errors and mistakes.

**4. Hire slowly, terminate quickly:** The employee you fire never keeps you up at night and once it is done; everyone wonders why it was not done years ago. Do a better job of interviewing and finding the right people. When people go sour and you have warned and tried to work with them, terminate the relationship.

**5. There is no magic compensation or bonus system:** Managing people is a pain and there is a tendency to substitute bonuses, commissions and other pay schemes for sound management. No matter how you pay people, you still have to manage them.

**6. Terminate attitude problems, train skill issues:** Non-performance tends to fall into two categories: skill problems (the employee can't do it) and attitude problems (the employee won't do it). Skill problems center on training and information. Attitude problems are about identification, potential correction and termination. Attitude problems can sometimes be confused with skill issues. For example, an employee who is uneducated and has poor handwriting might disguise this by calling "paperwork a waste of time." Always ask questions when dealing with an attitude problem and try to get employees to offer their own solutions. They know they are late to work and what time they should be at work; lecturing them rarely brings a change in behavior. Instead try, "You are late. We need you here on time, what can be done in the future to correct this?"

**7. Stick to the facts:** Attitude, quality, and other issues can be difficult to describe. Your 15-year old son's definition of doing a good job of cleaning up his room is probably quite a bit different than your definition of cleaning up his room. Be specific about the performance issues you expect and be specific when those expectations are not met.

**8. Focus on behavior, not personalities:** We all are different and have diverse personalities. Some of us are talkers, others listeners. Some of us thrive on chaos and conflict, others avoid it. It is unrealistic to think you and each of your employees will always get along. Your role is to focus on employee behavior, not to change an employee's personality. For example, my role is not to make you want to come to work every day but rather my role is make sure you do come in on time and are there to work. If we have a good work environment, great, but that is still not going to force each and every one of your employees to become a disciple of the "I love my job" club.

**9. Set goals and monitor results:** Everyone needs to know where they are going. Employees need both short-term and long-term targets. Short-term targets should revolve around job performance and learning skills. Long-term goals are more career path oriented and a little trickier. Don't make promises you can't keep but keep folks happy by establishing what success looks like in their job.

**10. Pre-job communication vs. post-job communication:** No matter how hard you try sometimes post-job performance discussions can be seen as criticism. Going over and asking for job input prior to the job starting is much more positive than asking why something did or did not happen.

**11. Fire with honor:** When it comes time to get rid of people, keep it simple. It does no good to get into "if you only did this kind of stuff." Document the non-performance issues to keep things legal and simply let them go.

**12. Offer hope but not optimistic denial:** With 24-hour negative news challenges and other issues, we all need hope. We need to know that we are doing the right thing and moving in the right direction. Hope is not denial. Hope is to wish for something with the expectation of fulfillment. Denial is the refusal to acknowledge an expectation that is not going to come true.