

## Member Communication Experience

# Why Some Great Employees Fail to Launch

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### ARE YOUR MANAGERS IN TUNE WITH YOUR BUSINESS?

A leader of a construction organization once said, “I hired a senior project manager. This manager had an amazing pedigree. Worked for amazing organizations prior to mine. Trained in all the best systems and software on the market. Then this manager came into my business and failed miserably. Barely lasted six months. So much for hiring the best and the brightest, huh?”

Several years ago, I wrote an article about making the Starbucks cup of coffee. In short, it was about how a multibillion-dollar organization with hundreds of thousands of associates could all create the same cup of coffee and also charge a premium price. How did they manage to do that? Among many elements on their recipe card were their abilities to create standardized processes, utilize consistent tools, and drive metrics throughout the businesses even as customers demand customized products.

So, the question for construction business owners is: Are your managers and superintendents creating one cup of coffee, or are there multiple methodologies in your organization – drip coffee, pods, percolators, French press, etc.? This brings us back to our leader from above. How can a seemingly amazing project manager fail to launch?

There are certainly plenty of duds and people who exaggerate their résumés and applications. But why do competent candidates fail? Hypothetically, Starbucks has a great system, and it would also be safe to assume they have a few good



baristas. Let’s say their No. 1 barista leaves to work for Dunkin’ or Tim Hortons. This would be a coup in the coffee world – or would it? The competition will set this superstar out on day one to brew coffee and serve the customers. Without guidance, that barista will simply default to the way they did it at the old place. More importantly, there will be new equipment, new processes, and an entirely different culture. In the end, the superstar coffee-maker will look like a watered-down decaf that’s been sitting on the burner too long.

How many individuals have been hired into your organization who looked like a home run but ultimately disappointed? They were talented and seemingly capable free agents. They would have made an immediate impact without the level of training a junior associate requires.

Furthermore, it only makes sense to expect more of a return on the investment since these associates likely expect higher compensation. If your organization cannot seem to break through when hiring those great candidates, it might be a great time to reflect inward.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Every business should have their own way of doing business. Starbucks has their way, and it works for them. Inserting their model into another coffee shop may not achieve the same results. The same concept holds true for a construction business. What works for one brand may not work for your business. Software, client type, support staff, and culture: There is a litany of external variables that served as catalysts for a manager in their previous environment. Inserting that manager into your organization does not automatically mean similar results. One of the best ways to ensure replicability is to ask about their environment to determine if there are parallels. Do you use the same platforms? Do you share similar trade partners, process concepts, or overall philosophies?

Second, when the senior associate begins, that infrastructure has to be in place. The processes, tools and firmwide metrics must exist. If they do not, that person will simply default to whatever system they utilized in their previous life.

Everyone loves hearing the phrase, “At my old company, this is the way we used to do it ...” The skin of current associates begins to crawl, and they mutter under their breaths, “Well, if it was so good, why did you leave?” Ultimately, the lack of infrastructure and control breeds contempt. More importantly, it may mask performance issues. Put another way, are margin erosion issues related to the manager, the lack of process, or both?


## CULTURAL FIT

Every business or team has a culture. Some are positive and strong, while others can be toxic. The toxicity may start to manifest itself from that previous comment: “If it was so great where you worked before, why don’t you go back?” Rifts start small but tend to become unmitigated canyons when mismanaged or left uncontrolled.

Managers quickly become branded as malcontents when they aren’t playing well in the “company sandbox” or “following the system” – even if there isn’t a system to follow.

Cultural fit is so important, but it is hard to gauge this in an interview. Determining whether someone can use a scheduling or project management software is relatively easy. Ascertaining whether someone will have the DNA to mesh well with a team is slightly more difficult. In fact, the lack of process and tools simply exacerbates cultural misalignment. Someone who may not fit well with a team may further drive a wedge between them and the rest of the business by reverting to a previous life.

There are solutions to help teams determine better alignment. Questions around firm values (i.e., “Tell us a time where you had a difficult client and how you relayed bad news,” or “How would you prioritize a project that was behind schedule but also had a trade partner that was safety challenged?”) help gauge how someone might respond to a given situation. Case studies built from real firm examples also provide opportunities to see how a candidate would answer. There are no right or wrong answers – just answers that correctly align to the firm.

Best-in-class firms will always leverage the abilities of talented, seasoned associates in the marketplace. Those same firms will also make sure that those talented individuals marry together on more than just a polished résumé. Most importantly, firms will ensure new managers not only make a great cup of coffee, but your firm’s cup of coffee. 



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### About the Author

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### About the Article

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