

A MATTER OF TALENT

MARCUS BUCKINGHAM

'Rather than generalizing, great managers individualize.'

One of my first jobs was at Gallup. My job was to measure the factors contributing to employee commitment. Among the clients was The Walt Disney Company, and they asked us to help them find more great domestic staff. I started the research with two preconceptions. The first, that anyone could do the job. The second was a question: who would want to do it? However, almost immediately I came to the following conclusion: anyone can do any job fairly well for a while, but any job that must be done exceptionally well requires certain talent.'

'We interviewed eight of the best 3,000 domestic employees that Disney already had. The first question that we asked was whether they were 'on stage' or 'behind the scenes,' since that's the way Disney differentiates staff exposed to the public from staff working in the back room. Without hesitation, they all answered that they were on stage since they constantly came across guests and interacted with them.'

'We then asked them when they could say that a room was clean. And they all responded that as soon as they finished cleaning they would lie on the bed and turn on the ceiling fan. Why would they do that, if the company policy clearly stated that it was forbidden to lie on the beds? They explained that the first thing that a guest does when he/she walks into the room is lie on the bed and turn on the fan. So, if any dust falls off the blades, it doesn't matter how clean the room is, they'll think that everything is dirty. What was surprising was that

these employees found it odd that the others also did things that were 'against the rules'. Clearly, it was part of their natural talent for providing good service.'

'I've dedicated my whole life to research. And I've focused specifically on studying great managers and great leaders; individuals that have done things exceptionally well. Eventually I noticed that they have certain traits in common. I always expect them to give great answers. And I don't always get them. I want to know, for example, why they achieve better performance from their team than others. I know that, to a large extent, such performance has to do with the good employee selection. But when I ask them what the best way to motivate a team is, I always get the same answer: 'It depends on the person'. And they believe it because they recognize that some people need certain 'supervision', while others work best if given autonomy.'

'The average manager plays checkers: all the pieces move the same way. However, a great manager plays chess: he knows the different values of each piece. He understands that power lies in the particular nature of each person. Instead of generalizing, great managers individualize.' ▀

© WOBI
ILLUSTRATION: GABRIEL IPPOLITI

After almost two decades as a researcher at Gallup, Marcus Buckingham founded his own company dedicated to creating coaching programs for leaders and tools designed to promote strengths. He is the author of several bestsellers: *First, Break All the Rules*; *Now, Discover Your Strengths*; *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*; *Find Your Strongest Life*; among others.

