

PUNISHED FOR PERFORMING

By Gayle Ochwat

Manager, Organizational Training & Education Human Resources, CalOptima, A Public Agency



Working for over 30 years with a variety of organizations has revealed to me that most people show up to their job every day with a desire to do their very best, and to contribute to the organization they call “home”. Few people spend their lives trying to do their worst, only to reap the consequences from their place of business.

As individuals, we each have a certain capacity, limitations in our intellectual aptitude, emotional intelligence and skills, however motivation comes from our talent, strengths and desire. These things, as well as outside influences can determine or

contribute to our level of performance on any given day. At best, there is normal variation day-to-day, at worst, steep highs and declining lows that are a cause for leaders to wonder about consistent performance.

I worked for a major hotel company for over 25 years. One story that was always used in our leadership training was one about the “Grease Trap”. As I recall, the story had to do with the least desirable task in the kitchen - cleaning out the grease trap on the kitchen floor. This task had to be performed regularly, daily. It was dirty and smelled awful and took quite a bit of time to do it right. Typically, our kitchen rotated the task amongst each of the staff members, and once the leader found someone who did an excellent job at cleaning, that person was given the permanent task of daily cleaning of the grease trap. This concept was referred to as “punished for performing” in the training. Besides illustrating the concept, the trainer would point out that soon employees would catch on to the process and began to approach this task with a little less diligence so that they would not be positioned to be the grease trap cleaner forever for doing such a good job.

As a leader, I have my “go-to” people. Those that regardless of the ask, will step up and perform the task in a timely and accurate manner without having to spend a great deal of time explaining them how to. But do I stop to ask myself - am I constantly giving the “worst” tasks to the same people simply because I know they will perform?

As leaders, we must recognize when this is occurring, and although easy to give the worst assignments to the people who perform them the best, sometimes we can be decreasing motivation and engagement by doing so.

Ideally, finding roles with tasks people excel at and have a desire to accomplish is the best combination. No job comes without some undesirable parts, although if a

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person feels as though they are being punished for performing well for the tasks they do not like doing, and this becomes the major part of their job, we may run the risk of losing good people.

Serving as a leader to others has taught me many things. I have found that celebrating others and recognizing their talent and strengths versus tolerating their differences has led me to have to healthy and productive working relationships.

For more information and further reading on Leadership, visit our [online library](#).



GAYLE OCHWAT, SHRM-SCP, SPHR

Gayle Ochwat, SHRM-SCP, SPHR has been a Learning and Organization Development practitioner for over 20 years, working as both an HR professional and operations leader in health care and hospitality industries. She is certified in MBTI, Franklin Covey's Project Management Essentials and 360 Reviews. Gayle's passion is helping others grow by understanding the unique strengths of individuals and facilitating their true potential.