

Smart Leaders

Striving to be better

How to help your employees grow and develop

By Brooke Bates

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When Tony Argiz was rising through the ranks of his accounting and consulting firm, he took every evaluation seriously. If just one employee criticized him, he would devote the next year to improving that aspect of his leadership style.

Now as CEO and managing partner of [Morrison, Brown, Argiz & Farra LLP](#), he encourages his 261 employees to seek progress in their career paths, as well.

"Obviously, they're our No. 1 asset. It starts with our employees," says Argiz, who led the company to fiscal 2008 revenue of \$60.2 million. "If our employees aren't happy and they're not developing, we can't really grow, and clients are going to not be satisfied."

Argiz uses employees' personality profiles to pair them with mentors and to deliver their evaluations. All the while, he stays in touch on a personal level to see how they're tracking.

Smart Business spoke to Argiz about guiding your employees toward development.

Match mentors by personality. At the time of hire, we do a personality index on the individual. It's called a predictive index. From 120 questions, it gives you four main components of the employees: whether they have leadership skills, whether they're introverted or extroverted, whether they're multitasked, and whether they're detailed.

We determine: Is she going to be a business development person? Is it someone that is going to be more technical? We look at their strengths and try to gear them in developing their careers based on that personality index.

You use the input from the mentor's PI and you also look at the new employee's PI to match them based on personality. If their predictive index indicates that that employee is quite extroverted, that might be someone that we could develop as a business development [person]. They're going to try to match that person with a mentor that's been successful in the business development area. Or if that employee shows that they're very detailed and multitasked and introverted, they might go to someone that's highly technical.

One supervisor might have five mentees. They will go to lunch with them once a month and try to give them ideas: 'What are your problems? What are you doing to succeed in your career? Are you getting your MBA? Are you studying for your CPA exam? Do you want to develop in other areas?' Try to get that information upfront so that employees' development path can be monitored and assisted.

We do it on a 12-month basis, so they have the ability every year to select someone else that they feel might have more of their traits. The only rules are that it be in the same department. You don't want a mentor for an auditor to be in the tax department, because they really don't work with each other. It has to be a supervisor that's constantly working with that employee so they can help them through their careers on a day-to-day basis.



Tony Argiz, CEO and managing partner, Morrison, Brown, Argiz & Farra LLP

Evaluate employees' progress. We try to make sure that they're evaluated after each job and that that evaluation is discussed with them. Beyond that, at the annual basis, there's a self-evaluation and also you evaluate your supervisors, and they evaluate you. It's important information to read and stay up to date with so you can react and make adjustments.

As an example, for communication skills, the leadership evaluation [asks], 'Keeps my team and others informed. Expresses thoughts clearly and forcefully. Is an active listener seeking to fully understand the meanings of others' communication.' Every supervisor and manager is graded on a possible score of 4 to a 1.

Say a supervisor ranks very low in the communication skills. You're going to sit with them and get some feedback from the employees that work with that manager: How can the communication skills of that manager improve?

Say, 'If I were to do this next time around, these are some of the techniques that I would use.' Do it through a learning experience. Sit with that individual and give them some feedback as to how they can become more efficient and effective in doing that work next year. You've got to be constructive, but be honest with the individual, too. Ask them what they did [and] what they should be doing.

If a person's got the leadership trait when they do the predictive index, you're going to let them take it on their own a lot easier than if you're talking to someone that draws on the left of the axis when it comes to leadership. They're more of a follower. Knowing the strength of that individual on the predictive index, you're going to go, 'This person's a leader,' you just feed them the information. The person that's more to the left of the axis on the leadership trait, you're going to sit with them and go, 'Here's how it should be done.' They want you to give them the road map.

Stay in touch. A lot of the problems with the employees don't necessarily come up to the top. You don't want them dying at the employee level. [It takes] constant communication with the employees to get that feedback. Don't play the CEO role; play a humble role and communicate with the employee so you can fully understand what their problems are.

Lunch is probably one of the best places to really get them free of stress and let them open up. I try to ... not have a meeting that's set up on a certain time and ends by another time. Let people have a constant communication and jump around in questioning so you can, at the end of the conversation — however long it lasts — get a true feeling of how that employee feels about the firm and their progress.

It's important to take it out of the office. In the office, you've got the phone, the e-mail, various things that are going to draw your attention, so outside of the office is always critical to get the employees relaxed and feel that you're giving them 100 percent of your time.

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