

Leadership and Personality

In a recent Business Network feature article, Laurie Sullivan discusses how top performers have the potential to far exceed goals and expectations — if they are managed carefully.

We all know the type: the key account sales manager who stays until midnight to finish next month's sales presentation; the marketing manager who gets as much done in five hours as others do in eight; the programmer who codes a new application on his day off.

But while overachieving employees can often prove to be miracle workers, they also present special challenges for the people who manage them. If you want to take advantage of all they have to offer, you need to lead them differently by considering the following points.

- **Identify the Overachiever**
The most important part of managing overachievers is recognizing them early — as early as the job interview. Look for telltale signs which include drive, setting high personal standards, impatience and advanced problem solving skills.
- **Understand the Personality Type**
Learn what motivates overachievers in order to get the best out of them. Don't just give pats on the back and expect gratitude in return. Because they tend to be spontaneous and have little patience for protocol, overachievers demand more of your time than others.
- **Lead by Inspiring, Not by Commanding**
Give top performers the flexible environment they need. Overachievers don't like to be told what to do. Managers get the best results from them if they involve them in decisions and planning whenever possible. If there's a problem with their work, rather than telling them how to fix it, ask them what they think the solution should be.
- **Make It Safe to Fail**
Overachievers love taking risks and often reach for unrealistic goals. Given their mindset, they hate to fail. But many do, simply because they've set their sights too high. Any setback can make them feel inferior. Intelligent managers should help employees accept failure, not punish them for it.
- **Turn Overachievers into Team Players**
Overachievers typically prefer to work alone to prevent getting bogged down (and sometimes to keep the kudos for themselves). Other employees also may prefer it that way if the overachiever is hypercritical or impatient. But there are times when collaborating is essential. Teach overachievers to listen and share problem solving. Try to pair coworkers who complement each other. Develop a coaching culture where the overachiever can act in a mentoring relationship.