



## **Selection Processes and High-Performance Work Systems Another Way to Get What You Really Need – “The Blunt Truth Option” Part 3**

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The **Blunt Truth** approach to selection is another way to **actually get what you need – the right people into the right roles with the right skills**. This option is focused on communicating the **Blunt Truth** about the new work system. The point is to paint such a clear picture that it enables every individual to sit down and really think about whether they are a fit for or want to be a part of the new work environment.

This approach is grounded in the idea that people can and will make informed, rational decisions if they have the right facts, the right information, and the right knowledge about the new work system. If people have the right data, they can make good choices. People have significant, not complete, but significant control over their future. Each individual decides to either opt in or opt out. The feeling of having control over “your” future is a big deal and creates enormous buy in from those that do opt in!

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You cannot truly own the equipment if you cannot decide whether or not you want to be a part of a new work system. The Blunt Truth approach is therefore as much an empowerment technique as it is a selection tool. This option models the idea that in a High-Performance Work System, individuals are expected to be decision makers and not just decision followers. Waiting for a supervisor to tell you what to do is anathema to High Performance. Any non-traditional organization wants, needs and requires independent thinkers and actors. This approach encourages employees to own their own destiny, which models what it means to own the process.

The fact that people make choices is liberating. In those cases where an individual opts out it is their choice, not some selection committee. If they opt in and then meet what are generally very few condition requirements of the new work system, they are in. They understand the reality of their future state. They walk in eyes wide open to the benefits and the risks. There is greater autonomy and greater accountability. They own not just the decisions they will make, but also the consequences of their decisions. This option models exactly what any ownership based organization wants and needs and must have to succeed – owners!

However, even though this option is straight forward, it is also very difficult to get right, as is true with everything else in major change initiatives. In fact, there are at least 12 really tricky issues that need to be addressed.



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The first is what is the Blunt Truth? What is the necessary information? What can be shared? What is not known? The operating workforce wants and deserves to know the answers to critical questions, e.g. what are the jobs in this new work system; what is this new work system; what will I be expected/required to do; how much money will I make, etc.

Simple, right? In the real world not so much.

The second is leadership cannot answer all of these questions in any useful detail. The work system is evolutionary. It is impossible to provide an accurate, detailed, specific answer to every one of these questions. A picture can be drawn of what we think it will be, but putting forth a detailed blue print is impossible. High Performance Work Systems operate more from guiding principles than from any set of defined rules. It is, by definition, fluid, adaptive and constantly shifting.

The third is that without an answer to these questions, it is difficult for any individual to decide what is in their best interests. If you were considering applying for or accepting a new position, you would want to know the salary, the roles and responsibilities, the general working conditions, etc. How would you feel if the answer to any of your questions is we do not know?



The fourth is the workforce has reasons for wanting concrete, stable, permanent answers. They want this because, often but not always, they do not trust current Leadership, and often but not always, there are legitimate reasons for this lack of trust.

The fifth is that Leadership usually has very real problems with flexibility rather than rules, open-endedness rather than Standard Operating Procedures, and principles rather than policy. If leaders cannot lead differently than how can operators operate differently?

The sixth is that unfortunately organizations most in need of transformation are most often deeply stuck in a command and control mind set. How can the operators own the process if leadership cannot let go, and even worse do not want to let go, or even worse are terrified of their leader's response if they do let go?



The seventh is getting everyone on the same page about what it means to own the process, be self-directed, and function in a non-traditional work system. What leaders mean by operator ownership is often not at all what an operator's definition of ownership is, and vice versa.

The eighth is the trap of thinking that the new work system is the end goal rather than improved productivity, safety and quality. Transformational change is not a social experiment. It is a means to an end, not the end itself.

The ninth is any group-think resulting in a belief that higher compensation is the reward for becoming a part of the new work system. Higher compensation is for improved results, improved competitiveness. Period!

The tenth is in every change endeavor, compensation trumps everything else. Employees that know they cannot succeed in any position in the new work system will self-select in because of the money. If you think about it, you would probably do the same thing!



The eleventh is that even those that self-select out can come back and haunt you. Buyer's remorse, second guessing, Monday morning quarterbacking will all likely kick in.

The twelfth, and perhaps the most critical, is the effectiveness of the performance management process during and post start up. What will you do when someone is not making the grade? I guarantee you that someone will not be able to meet expectations. I guarantee you that there will be issues with both leadership and operators. At some point more training, more mentoring, more anything and everything is not enough and for the sake of the system action will be required to redress the problem.

The Blunt Truth option eliminates or avoids many of the pitfalls of other approaches. It sharply minimizes the have and have nots dilemma. It models ownership right from the starting gate. It places the core responsibility for selection right where it needs to be, in the hands of those who will be working in the new system. It saves an incredible amount of time and effort that is often fruitlessly spent in attempts to craft a perfect, multi hurdle selection process. It can often be the path that keeps the peace while setting the stage for success. The Blunt Truth option will take more time, but it will save you a host of migraine headaches.

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**S. Eric Christensen**



A results-oriented organizational effectiveness practitioner, with over 35 years of hands on experience in designing and implementing sustainable work system/cultural change initiatives. Intellectually knowledgeable enough to know what might work. Experienced enough to know what will work. Have coached and mentored leadership, from Front Line Supervisors to Superintendents to VPs. Have a real knack for quickly establishing, strong trust-based relationships.

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