

# "SOME HIGH PERFORMERS ARE JUST NOT MEANT TO BE MANAGERS"



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James was one of the best salespeople in his company. He consistently met or exceeded his sales goals and, as one of the top producers, was admired for his ability to get results. James loved the road, the flexibility that his job offered, and the autonomy that went with his role.

When an opportunity for Regional Sales Manager became available at his company, James was approached by the Vice President of Sales and asked if he would consider the post. James was flattered, but he had never really thought about himself as a manager or leader before- just a top notch salesperson. The Vice President told James that he was a “natural” for the position: he knew the company and its product lines inside and out. “You don’t want to be just a salesperson your entire career, do you?” his boss inquired.

With some trepidation, James accepted the role. Within a few months, however, he realized how different sales management was from sales. Now, instead of being accountable for just his own efforts and results, he was responsible for those of others. He started to miss the contact with his customers, and became frustrated at having to deal with the myriad challenges that face all managers.

For the first time in his career, James started to feel like a failure. It became clear that he had made a mistake in accepting the managerial role, and now he felt trapped. Caught in a dilemma, he felt too embarrassed to admit his discontent and failings to his Vice President or to Human Resources.

Up until now when headhunters called, James would be polite, but tell them he wasn’t interested. But now he needed a graceful way out. So, when a headhunter called with an opening for a senior sales position at another company, he listened. Shortly thereafter, James was recruited out of his organization. He was thrilled to be able to go back to sales, and felt badly about leaving his company, but felt he had no other choice. When he resigned, his company was stunned by the move and angry with James for his “betrayal.”

The above scenario happens frequently in business. And with some awareness and planning, this unfortunate situation might have been prevented. While a top performing salesperson might in fact be a viable candidate for sales manager, a company should never assume this. How sad that this misjudgment cost them a top producing employee.

While many companies believe in promoting from within, sometimes that is not the best direction. All too frequently, and usually without realizing it, companies get caught up in the convenience factor. That is, it is easier to promote someone who already knows ropes than it is to bring in an outsider.

Without pre-planning for future vacancies, the company was putting itself at risk to become reactive when the managerial job opened up. In considering James for the position, everyone looked at his knowledge and eligibility for the position, but not the suitability, or fit factors.

Yes, James knew the product and the business. But what everyone overlooked was that many aspects of the sales job that made him such a successful salesperson were missing from the managerial role!

Career development for the employee and succession planning for the company go hand-in-hand. If a discussion is held while there is no open position, there will be less pressure on both parties, and the match between the person’s best strengths and the company’s needs can be given thoughtful consideration.