

A Consultant's View

Vol. XXIII No. 1

January 2016

Managing Misfits

Recently, the unemployment rate officially dropped well below six percent. However, more importantly, the labor participation rate also dropped to the lowest level in a long time. More people are dropping out of the workforce than try to get their next job. Millennials are opting to be self-employed at a far higher rate than the previous generation. More and more people claim to not fit the jobs being offered.

In order to fill those jobs, we have the opportunity to work with misfits.

When trying to fill a job, it is all too easy to recruit clones. But a company built on similar people lacks what it takes to drive creativity or build resiliency. We do best to find different types of people. We do best to have some misfits in our companies.

The first objection is that misfits don't get the job done. There are multiple companies that have built major products or services through working with misfits. For example, much of the database, MySQL, was built by people who were not part of the normal corporate structure. It took a very different type of management to keep a project moving forward.

Secondly, there are different types of misfits. There are those who are highly creative. There are those who have disabilities. There are those who have been branded by their time in the prison system. There are those who come from other cultures or subcultures. We may

choose to work with a specific misfit type.

Phil Romano who self-claims to be a misfit for the corporate life is the creative type. He created the Macaroni Grill restaurant chain and more.

Managing misfits requires adaptive management. A management that forces people to fit into rigid roles and predefines all tasks will not work. Yes, such management can force submission and deliver something, but only by ignoring the eventual bill.

Most advice for dealing with misfits is to identify them as quickly as possible and then to let them go. "There is always someone better out there." These techniques work in an

environment where there are more available workers than jobs. When workers become scarce, if we let them go, we have to live with the lack of any worker for a while.

There are other ways of dealing with misfits. There are groups that specifically seek such people out because of their creative energy and how they can solve problems that stump the rest of the company.

When managing misfits, much of the management energy will be spent on "managing up". Misfits will cause problems with the company processes and culture. It is important to constantly show the value of such creativity to the rest of the organization. We also need to make sure that everyone, including the misfits, understand what it means to succeed and how we are all measured in that success. We need to champion such people to those who would deride them for their differences.

Misfits Have
Created
Major Products

Wrong view of Innovations

Last year, Quirky was flying high as an invention factory. They were getting thousands of invention ideas a week and they were moving new products into distribution at a rapid rate. This fall, they filed for bankruptcy protection and the place is basically closed down. Other "idea to patent" companies have gone under also and those that still exist often only survive on the fees they charge the inventor. We have a wrong view of innovation. The TV ads for inventors suggest that all we need is a good idea and we will have a new product. The reality is that most new ideas do not go anywhere. A recent Viewpoints in the Communications of the ACM points out that only one in 500 patents make its inventor any money. (I'll take that \$1 I was paid for mine as my profit.) Innovation is not about a product or idea. It is about changing the community around us. We may do that change with a product, but more often, we change the community through service and selling. The other side is that the community we live in often changes what we can do. While changes in regulations are some of those changes, society changes often without such regulation. Efforts at the government level to stop such social changes rarely work for very long in a democratic society. Successful innovators are more often those who recognize that they are at the peak of a wave and ride that wave to success. That requires focus not on invention, but on making inventions work in the current social environment. The reason why America is the center of innovation has to do more with how we accept new people, new ideas, and changes to our society more than any education or government program. We innovate through working with others.

Risky World

Now that companies are implementing numerous Bring Your Own Device policies, the next type of device comes in. The Internet of Things offers many more devices that can track, spy, or be used to infiltrate. Security departments need to worry about a fitness tracker or the child carrying a Barbie doll as both can be compromised.

A Consultant's View is published by
Prairie Trail Software, Inc.,

**Making Information
from Streams of Data**

1-800-618-4199

www.prairietrail.com
copyright© Prairie Trail Software, Inc.
All rights reserved

Prairie Trail Software, Inc



3821 Beaumont Lane
Plano, TX 75023

Address Service Requested

Prairie Trail Software, Inc.

Making *Information* from Streams of Data

Custom Software Solutions

For the Business Improvement

We provide technology for

More Profit

We pull the whole system together
- or just the parts you need

Business Process Automation

Database Design and Management

Web Services and Servers

Custom solutions to meet your needs

Call 1800-618-4199
www.prairietrail.com