

How Do You Recognise Busy-Looking Deadbeats In Your Business Development Team Tomicide Solutions

A Monthly Business Development Newsletter For Privately
Held IT Companies And Independent IT Professionals

By Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan

March 2013



[Blog entry](#)

Have you heard that in a 1997 interview in Cigar Aficionado magazine with Arthur Marx, actor Peter Falk (Lieutenant Columbo) said...

"I remember once in high school the umpire called me out at third base when I was sure I was safe. I got so mad that I took out my glass eye, handed it to him and said, 'Try this.' I got such a laugh you wouldn't believe."

Although you may be hampered with the total lack of a glass eye, but with a little luck you too can recognise deadbeats in your business development team.

There are both good and bad news here.

The good news is that, provided you run a business development team and not a business development work group (comparison table at the end of article), you don't have to recognise them, because your team has already identified the person and most probably is about to request his removal.

One piece of bad news is that if you don't remove that person, then you have the mass exodus of your best people on your hands.

The other piece of bad news is that in many IT companies the slacker is a friend of some high-ranking people, which by default makes him a sacred cow who can't be reprimanded let alone being fired.

So, as time goes on, and team members realise that the deadbeat stays on the team, so gradually the best team members start quitting, usually taking some of the other best team members with them.

Sooner or later the team consists of the bottom-feeders (from mediocre to plain useless) that don't have the courage to leave, because they know they wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell to find other jobs based on their low competence levels.

So, how do you recognise those loafers, considering there are some really gifted people who can appear to be impressively busy while doing nothing useful?

First look at the culture of your own company. Are your people rewarded for busy-ness or for performance?

For a moment, Mark Twain comes to mind...

"Thunder is good, thunder is impressive; but it is lightning that does the work."

Sadly, in many IT companies I've come across, spectacular busy-ness is valued more highly than quiet but superior performance.

Just look at who get promoted in most organisations. In many cases it's the losers who can't perform, but can show impressive busy-ness and can play the company's political game really excellently.

And at the end of the year who get the fat bonuses? No, not the performers. It's the busy-looking political game players.

The reality is that the people who do profitably correct work in the company get less recognition than the people who do politically correct work... even if it costs the king's ransom for the company.

I reckon if you've ever worked in a unionised environment, you know how clever those union loafers can be at looking incredibly busy while achieving precisely dick.

This is why unionised companies are grossly overstaffed. They need five or more union moochers to do the work of one professional.

Three Types Of Candidates

As you sit across the table with new candidates to your company, you will meet three types of people:

1. The busy loafer
2. The impressive self-promoter
3. The real performer

So, how do you separate them? It's not easy, but it can be done.

You have to ask the kind of polarising questions that they answer differently.

If you ask the most typical interview question of "Tell me about yourself!", then the busy loafers and the impressive self-promoters will have a field day. Now they have an opportunity to talk about themselves, their education and about how hard they work. They can talk about how often they go to work hours before normal business hours, and how often they stay late because they are so incredibly busy.

What you can notice is that they carefully avoid talking about the value they've created that had become profit for their employers.

Then you ask them the question of "How did your employers' bottom lines improve by having you on board?", and they stare at you like a urinating hog on a midsummer day.

And what happens when you ask top performers the same questions.

To the "Tell me about yourself!" question, they look at you being uncertain about what you want to hear. They probably get surprised about the lack of specificity of the question. They quickly switch over to performance-related answers.

And here is the problem.

You see, many business owners are so dumb that they relegate talent courting and attraction to HR departments, but the problem is that HR, as a profession, got stuck in the industrial age, and totally ignores how knowledge workers operate and differ from industrial workers.

Besides, recruiters are more interested in covering their arses than recruiting kick-arse talent. They focus on common features like resumes (Ridiculum Vitae) and answers to brain dead and politically correct questions, but neglect performance capability because that's outside their areas of expertise.

All in all, 99% of recruiters do understand resumes and cover letters but don't understand performance. So, more often than not, they make politically correct hiring not profitably correct hiring.

Politically correct in a sense that new recruits must fit into the company's mould and must accept organisational dogmas... or else.

So, most IT companies are staffed, or even stuffed, with busy loafers and impressive self-promoters.

And sadly, real performers are as rare as strawberries in Greenland.

And the reality is that impressive self-promoters can easily lie themselves into important positions because they can put up impressive facades and can charismatically answer even the most fiendish questions.

They can talk in such impressive terms that most interviewers pee themselves in delight upon hearing their nonsense, believing they are talking to real performers.

Also, the other problem is the recruiters, mainly HR professionals, are looking for perfect resumes from cradle to the last moments before the resume's submission.

So, the busy loafers and especially the impressive self-promoters hire professionals to create impressive resumes, knowing that most recruiters fall for impressive style even if it's void of substance.

One thing is certain. You will never meet the perfect salesperson, the perfect webmaster, the perfect marketing strategist or the perfect copywriter.

They don't exist. That's something you develop in people. Performance is a combination of a few things, including but not limited to candidates' skills, values, behaviours, organisational culture and some other factors.

And past performance has nothing to do with future performance.

For instance, you hire a marketer who was a marketing superstar in her B2C corporate jobs selling impulse items.

Now you hire her to do B2B marketing for your complex, high-ticket, hard-to-explain products/services.

And this B2C commodity superstar will be a bumbling idiot in your high-end B2B world.

You can't even go by marketing education, because most universities teach B2C commodity marketing, using case studies from Wal-Mart and McDonalds. And that is 99% useless in the B2B world.

The way I see it, both tigers are merely oversized cats, but just because you can train your cat to use the litter box, it doesn't necessarily mean that you could train a tiger to do the same.

Technically, anyone can start the process, but not everyone can finish it... without being eaten.

Yes, we come across different people, and people have both strong and weak sides.

The interesting thing is that busy loafers and impressive self-promoter play themselves up. They

try to dress up their weaknesses as if they could be easily developed into strengths. But if it's so easy, why haven't they done it yet?

Anyway, they tend to behave like some kind of human peacocks shaking their tail feathers and commanding attention from everyone in vicinity. The spotlight must be on them.

Their whole behaviour is as suspicious as a nun doing squats in a cucumber field.

By contrast, real performers tend to play themselves down. See lieutenant Columbo. He's unassuming, apologetic, yet an excellent detective. Instead of tough-talk and threats, he gets what he wants by outsmarting the criminals. The tough-talk cops read the lines. Columbo reads between the lines. He's a details guy.

In an interview instead of just asking what results candidates have achieved, ask about...

- Partial results and milestones
- How the results and milestones were achieved – methodologies
- Were the results and milestones achieved individually or in teams
- What types of help the candidate used in her work

At this point some people want to other people who can vouch for the candidate's achievement. I believe that's silly because by the same token we could tell the candidate face-to-face that she's a liar and we don't believe one single word she's told us. It's not exactly the starting point of a good relationship.

Yes, and some people may say that if she wants to work at a company, she has to conform to the company's rules.

Does she now?

Peter Drucker predicted many years ago that companies need talented employees more than talented people need employers.

Let's face it, the only people who are worth hiring are people who are savvy at acquiring new business. Everyone else can be found on a situational basis. Implementers are a dime a dozen. A business' future hinges on its ability to acquire and retain clients. And that's everyone's job in a business.

But let's have...

A Few Words On References

I wouldn't even bother.

My take is that if I look someone in the eye, we have to be able to decide whether or not we can work together.

Earlier in my consulting career I used to agree to reference checks, and it turned out that the buyers who were adamant to check my references were the biggest shysters in my career.

The interesting thing is that scam artists can scam only those people who play honestly, because

honest play is predictable. Dishonest play is not. And scam artists base their games on other people's honesty. Otherwise scam artists would get scammed.

Checking references is a preventive action to make sure that deadbeats don't penetrate your company. Of course, it doesn't work. Canada (and I reckon other countries too) is riddled with paedophile school teachers and sports coaches who got their jobs after extensive reference checks. Yet...

The problem is that talented people are eccentric and they don't take it well when you basically tell them that you don't trust them. That's what the reference is all about.

"I don't believe a word you say until and unless a total stranger confirms it for me."

Talented people bring you the kind of expertise that could mean millions of dollars in your piggy bank. And your company needs those people more than they need your company. They are good marketers and salespeople, so they could easily go into competition against you. So, they resent when they are treated with scepticism, cynicism and suspicion.

Here you are better off playing evasive action. So, the right person can enter your company, but the wrong person thinks twice before signing your contract.

First, before hiring people full-time, you start them out on fixed-term contracts. This can be six months.

And you put some closes into the contract. For instance...

"If it turns out that you've lied your way into your position and can't perform what you've been hired for, after disengagement, you're requested to return three times of the full compensation you've received. That will cover both our costs of engaging you and part of the opportunity costs you've lost for us."

Or

"As a professional, I expect you to stand behind the quality of your work. If there is a definite and specific violation of professional or ethical conduct in your work, we end the engagement and you return the full compensation you've received."

Busy loafers and impressive self-promoters would run from such a contract, but real performers have nothing to worry about.

On Summary

The reality is that we've shifted from the industrial age to the knowledge age. According to the World Bank¹, 75% of the world's wealth is brainpower not brawn power, land or other tangible things.

What that means is that the way IT companies acquire talents must change too.

IT professionals with business savvy can easily start businesses and compete against their former

¹ A report entitled *Where Is The Wealth Of Nations?*

employers.

But IT professionals without business savvy can't run successful businesses and, realistically, are pretty worthless as employees too. Companies can hire narrow specialists to do the work on a contract basis.

Regarding talents at your company, you may want to consider the following statistics From Mike Myatt, a contributing writer for Forbes.

- More than 30% of employees believe they'll be working someplace else inside of 12 months.
- More than 40% of employees don't respect the person they report to.
- More than 50% of employees say they have different values from their employers.
- More than 60% of employees don't feel their career goals are aligned with the plans their employers have for them.
- More than 70% of employees don't feel appreciated or valued by their employers.

Can you imagine how marginal the performance that these people put in? They may look busy, but they're really just cruising.

According to Mike, these are the top 10 reasons why top-tier talents leave their employers.

1. Management's failure to unleash people's passions
2. Management's failure to challenge people's intellect
3. Management's failure to engage people's creativity
4. Management's failure to develop people's skills
5. Management's failure to give people a voice
6. Management's failure to care about their people
7. Management's failure to lead their people – Any moron can manage. Leading is a different ballgame
8. Management's failure to recognise people's contributions
9. Management's failure to increase people's responsibility
10. Management's failure to keep commitments

And before I sign off, I'd like to take the opportunity to encourage you to read two brilliant books to shift your mind about talent acquisition.

Confessions of an Advertising Man by David Ogilvy. David wrote it in 1963, but it's as valid today as it was ahead of its time then.

But was it really ahead?

Following these four basic principles...

1. **Research:** Coming, as he did, from a background in research, he never underestimated its importance in advertising. In fact, in 1952, when he opened his own agency, he billed himself as research director.

2. **Professional discipline:** "I prefer the discipline of knowledge to the anarchy of ignorance." He codified knowledge into slide and film presentations he called Magic Lanterns. He also instituted several training programs for young advertising professionals.
3. **Creative brilliance:** Had a strong emphasis on the "BIG IDEA."
4. **Results for clients:** "In the modern world of business, it is useless to be a creative, original thinker unless you can also sell what you create."

...David built the world's most successful advertising agency. And it was his clients that called it successful, not him or the media.

Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams by Tom DeMarco and Timothy R. Lister. This is an excellent book on how to coordinate work in a high-performance work environment.

If you pick up just some morsels from these books, you can make a drastic positive impact on your business development team's performance.

In the meantime, don't sell harder. Market smarter, so your business can be better off for it.

Traditional Workgroups vs. Contemporary Teams

Traditional Workgroups	Contemporary Teams
Order of commitment and accountability	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individual 2. Team 3. Engagement (Project, mission, etc.) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engagement (Project, mission, etc.) 2. Team 3. Individual
Internal competition among group members	External competition and internal collaboration and cooperation
May individual – mainly hidden - agendas	One single agenda
Stale and stodgy	Innovative
Autocratic leadership	Participative leadership
Kick starters	Self-starters
No linkage between the group's success and the company's success	Direct linkage between the team's success and the company's success
Independent or over-dependent members	Interdependent members
Group members tolerate each other and the work they do	Team members enjoy their work and enjoy the company of people with whom they work
No sense of urgency to get the work done	There is a sense of urgency to get the work done

Traditional Workgroups	Contemporary Teams
Workgroups thrive on avoiding risk and ambiguity	Teams thrive on challenge and ambiguity
When one member justifiably gets pissed off with management and quits	
...the rest of the group breathes a sigh of relief	...the rest of the team follows that person (team cohesion)
Little or no redundancy: Segregated silos of narrow specialists	Significant redundancy: Deep generalists with multiple skills each
Good example: Government, most publicly traded companies	Good example: Military, some privately traded companies

About The Author



Since 1998, after a 16-year industrial stint as an electronics/computer engineer, project manager and technical buyer, Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan has been working with privately held information technology companies and independent IT professionals to market and sell their complex, high-ticket and hard-to-explain IT solutions to high-end, sophisticated clients.

For Tom's free white paper, "More Brain Less Brawn: High-Leverage Client Acquisition Strategies For Privately Held IT Companies In The Knowledge-Based Economy", go to <http://www.varjan.com>