

leadership instalments

Misfits

By Dan Gaynor

EACH DECEMBER, I DRAW ON A CLASSIC CHRISTMAS movie (I love them all) for a uniquely seasonal look at leadership. This year I'm calling on a movie I eagerly anticipated each year a youngster - the classic 1964 adaptation of Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer. I spent many Christmas Eves watching it as I waited for my grandparents to arrive. I still enjoy it. It is the story of three misfits: Yukon Cornelius, a prospector who couldn't find gold if he tripped over it; Herbie, an elf who is no good at making toys; and our hero, Rudolph.

Early in the movie, Rudolph shows real promise in Reindeer school, until the disguise his father placed on his nose falls off and his eccentricity is revealed. He is ridiculed and cast out, and so his journey to redemption begins. Herbie, facing the same ridicule sets out with him. Along the way they meet Yukon Cornelius, Rudolph matures, and we see his courage as he faces down the Abominable Snowman to save Clarice, the love of his life.

This classic has a lot to teach about something I call Job Fit. You see, each of us is a misfit for something. No one comes with the same gifts and talents. We are all unique. Some people have a talent for math, or for building things - I certainly do not. Others have the patience for customer service or the persuasive talent that underpins success in sales. The trouble comes when our talents are poorly matched to our work, it can be deeply discouraging. So when a leader sees this and does nothing about it, he or she is not serving anyone well. Employees in these situations are always frustrated because they are set up to fail. They can't contribute to their teams by doing something they are good at, and enjoy.

When the match is good, high performance and high job satisfaction are natural outcomes. Everybody gets what they need. So how can a leader be sure? Performance is always the best indicator. When it is poor, skillful and caring leaders step in with lots of feedback and coaching. If performance issues are resolved and the individual seems to be enjoying the work, the leader can dismiss Job Fit concerns.

When performance doesn't get better, the leader can be certain of a genuine Job Fit issue. When this is the case, both leader and follower should discover through the process that the job is a poor fit. But your work as leader may not be over yet. People need two things to make a change when a job is wrong - the insight to know it, and the courage to do something about it. When someone can't find the courage to leave, you must force the issue. While you can't guarantee the next job will be the ideal one, you can be sure that no one finds the right job until they leave the wrong one.

Rudolph's story teaches another lesson: differences can be perceived as strengths or threats. Good leaders help everyone see



that every team is stronger when different talents come together to serve a common mission.

As the movie draws to a close, all three find their rightful places: Cornelius as tamer of the Abominable Snow Monster, Herbie as North Pole dentist, and Rudolph as the right choice to lead through a crisis. We should want nothing less for each person we lead.

Discussion Questions:

1. **What are your core talents?**
2. **Have you ever been in a role where you were a "misfit"?**
3. **Are there people on your team today who may have job fit issues? Are you prepared to resolve them?**
4. **Do the members of your team value their differences?**

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