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Learning to Fly

Why a Texas non-profit had to fill key positions with unseasoned candidates — and how they made it work



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So, Where Do You Start?

What do you do when you are responsible for creating a productive, cohesive team and you aren’t really sure where to start? And what happens when a stroke of bad timing forces you to speed up your process into an almost unreasonable timetable? **Understanding behavioral styles is the perfect place to start and can be the key to finding the right people for the right positions.** So how does one go about learning these skills?

Tara Roussett, CEO of non-profit organization SJRC Texas (St. Jude’s Ranch for Children), was able to use the power of behavioral assessments for her organization by working with a skilled local business coach named Terry Barnhart. Specializing in this field, Terry assessed Tara’s staff and was able to make recommendations as to how Tara could maximize her team’s capabilities.

Tara’s true story describes how the information she learned throughout this process changed SJRC for the better by understanding each other on a whole new level. She discusses how it has enabled the organization to work more effectively together, enabling them to help more children in need. It all started with a deeper understanding of each team member’s behavioral style.

“As CEO of a non-profit organization that has been caring for the most vulnerable children and families facing extreme hardship, I need to run a very efficient and effective organization,” says Roussett. “For almost 30 years, we have taken care of kids and families facing abuse, neglect and often homelessness, helping them to heal from the traumas they have suffered. The programs of SJRC Texas cover a continuum of care to ensure that children placed in our care receive therapeutic treatment along their journey of healing towards a brighter future.”

The Challenge

Roussett's biggest challenge was that due to movement within the organization, several of the company's workers were promoted to key positions they may not yet have been fully qualified to fill. Since immediate need dictated much of the transition, the new team was assembled quickly. These workers needed to learn their new job duties quickly while effectively executing these duties, whether they were ready or not. In addition to learning their new positions on the fly, these employees needed to understand how to work well together to ensure they were going to be a fully effective team.

As the leader, Roussett didn't have time to be calculated about moving people into new positions. The nature of the organization that she oversees is one of constant action and the kids the organization serves needed proper attention. She needed help putting together the right team so that her organization could operate effectively. That's where business coach Terry Barnhart came to the rescue.

The Importance of a Business Coach

"We met Terry at a chamber meeting and talked about some of our challenges we were having at the time. He offered to work with us. The information found in these assessment reports was eye-opening and extremely helpful in getting us to better understand one another and to work better together," said Roussett.

Terry had the seven key team members take assessments that analyzed behavioral styles as well as drivers (motivators). The results uncovered not only how the workers behaved the majority of the time, but why they behaved the way they did. The report showed insight as to what was likely driving behaviors as well as key indicators of why a certain person may or may not excel in a certain position.

Armed with the results of the assessments, Barnhart pointed out each member's strengths and weaknesses and coached them how to communicate most effectively with

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each other. They discussed the unique characteristics of individual behavioral styles and applied this knowledge to work better as a cohesive unit. He did a one-on-one session with each member of the team and had several full-team sessions to ensure that everything they learned was being applied effectively.

At first, Roussett was cautiously optimistic, albeit a little skeptical, about the effect that this knowledge would have on her staff, long term. She would come to be pleasantly surprised with the results.

The Results

“The results played out exactly the way our business coach predicted,” said Roussett. **“He really helped us understand who we are and what our strengths and weaknesses are.** He gave us great advice about how to work together as a team and even gave us follow up resources to continue our learning,” she says.

While the team, overall, showed a noticeable improvement working together as a unit, there were a few specific examples that really stood out to Roussett.

Specific Stories of Success

“One specific member of the team really improved her attention to detail after the training. To be honest, she had a problem focusing on details, and since I’m very detail-oriented, it was creating friction between us,” Roussett explains. “Her behavioral profile confirmed she was not good working with minute details. This revelation helped me realize that she wasn’t this way intentionally; it was just a byproduct of her behavioral style. Knowing this improved relations between us. Once we worked with Terry, she began to feel


comfortable owning the fact that she wasn’t a detail specialist. Because of that she began to lean on other team members who were more detail-oriented to make sure she was seeing projects through to completion in full detail,” says Roussett.

The cultural change that took place because of this coaching was that work-related issues no longer became personal. If a problem arose, the people involved would address it and consider ways to find a solution without ever placing blame on an individual. That made working together much easier among the team members. Roussett commented that this particular coworker no longer gets offended when others provide corrections or make suggestions . She now knows it’s about the quality of the work, not a judgement of her work or an attack on her personally.

Roussett had another specific success story to share.

“Our controller is a very analytical person. She is not someone who wants to sit around and listen to a bunch of personal stories. Instead, she prefers for people to get straight to the point with her,” says Roussett. “This behavior style could lead others to believe she was mean or closed-off. However, the results of the assessments explained the *why* behind this behavior.”





“It turns out that she’s not that way at all. Her behavioral style simply reflects someone who likes to stay on task while in a work setting. Now we know not to make small talk when we speak with her in the working setting; just stick to the facts. Once we were aware of this and adjusted to her behavioral style, she opened up and became much easier to work alongside,” she says.

Conclusion

Having the right tools and the right coach made all the difference in the world.

“When all was said and done, Terry’s process had a great impact on the organization,” Roussett recalls. “We are so absolutely grateful to Terry for sharing his knowledge, expertise and time with us for the betterment of the kids,” she says.

The big revelation for Tara was that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. **The key is to utilize those strengths and try to lessen opportunities that may highlight weaknesses.** Now they shift certain responsibilities to people that fit the skill set for a particular task. The team is more productive and much happier. According to Roussett, the end result is unmistakable. The more you know about how and why a person behaves the way they do, the better chance you have of putting the right people in the proper positions.

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