

Don't Keep -- and Stop Creating -- Poor, Ineffective Managers

"I understand what you're saying, but he's a top notch underwriter, the best we've ever had. Our chief competitor has been after him for years, and we had to do something to keep him. I know he's creating problems, but he's still with us. So, on balance, I think it was right to do."

What is this conversation about? It's about the problems created by placing a highly skilled and valued employee in a management position he has no business holding. You know who this person is. It's the person behind the office door that's always closed; the one whose desk, credenza and the floor around them are covered with stacks of *his* files: the guy everyone goes to for professional advice but that's all. Sure he's good and agents love him, but do you realize the price you're paying for making him manage people? And do you realize that he's not any happier and may leave anyway? Now, instead of simply handling your biggest, ugliest and most personally satisfying cases, you've saddled him with management stuff he hates and will never be good at.

If you have a manager like this (and I'm almost certain that you do), fix it...soon, before it causes anyone else to leave. People interested in making underwriting, claims or the other core insurance professions a career are dwindling in numbers, and the very least you can do to keep them is give them good leadership.

And what do you do with him (or her)? Well, for starters, you can make him a full time technician (in this case, underwriter) again. It's clear that's what he likes and he's extremely good at it, so give him the opportunity to do it. HR can help you work out any special salary, title and/or other arrangements that will be needed. In fact, they'll probably be anxious to do it. They've been stuck with the personnel fallout since the person's selection as manager and would welcome the opportunity to finally fix it.

Another option is to first evaluate the organization's broader needs -- the soundness of your underwriting policies and practices, the general strength of the entire underwriting staff, the audit and review processes that are in place, etc -- and determine if they need strengthening. If they do, this person might be the one to lead that effort. It's not a management position, but it is critical to the company's ongoing success and one that can be highly satisfying -- for the right person. A "Chief Underwriter" or "Chief Examiner" can easily equate to a director or even officer-level role.

If you do this, he, the rest of the underwriters and others will thank you. He'll get what he wakes up each morning wishing he had; they'll finally get the help and support they need; their skills will broaden and grow...and, who knows, you might even develop someone whose skills rival those of the person you can't afford to lose. The broader your staff's collective knowledge the less dependent you will be on any one individual. And that's a good thing.

Clearly, you can't (nor should you) do this for every poor manager you have. But if you have one you absolutely cannot afford to lose, this may be a better way to deal with it. If this interests you, give me a call. We know how to develop and make it work. It's what we do. Also, feel free to check our website (McDonaldConsultingGroup.com) for other topics of interest.