

First, Break all the Rules Book Report

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Introduction

As the book *First, Break all the Rules* begins by saying, the world's leading managers come in all different races, genders, and ages. Through two key studies carried out by the Gallup Organization over a twenty five year period, one key similarity is glaring: they all break every rule of conventional wisdom. This book is the culminating product of these two studies, which include insight gleaned from interviewing 80,000 managers and one million employees.

Summary of the Authors' Main Points

The book is broken up into seven chapters, all of which contain relevant information, useful rules and real-life examples of management failure and success.

The first chapter addresses the issue of measuring aspects that seem to be immeasurable. The chapter begins with an interesting anecdote about Great Britain losing ships in 1707 due to a factor, known to be important and crucial, being immeasurable. The authors link this story to the picture that has become clear in today's businesses. They say that it is clear to companies that finding and keeping talented employees is a vital charge, however they do not know how to ensure that they are doing this well. The authors share that through the interviews of one million employees, they were able to analyze through the data to choose the questions which gave them a true measurement of a strong workplace. They state that twelve questions can be an accurate measurement of the fundamental elements needed to find, focus, and keep talented employees. These questions are interesting, as they are not necessarily questions about the productivity of the company, but they focus on the employees' perceptions and feelings towards the company, their

leadership, and their opportunities to grow, learn, and shine in the workplace. These twelve questions leave little room for ambiguity, as they are pointed questions that guide employees to make strong statements about the workplace. For example, they ask questions such as, “Do I have a best friend at work?” and “In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?” By asking specific questions, the authors suggest that they are able to pick out the strongest departments and businesses. People who have positive answers to these questions work in the stronger business units with higher levels of productivity, retention, and customer satisfaction.

The second chapter focuses on what great managers know and what great managers do. A great manager, they say, takes the role of a catalyst in their company. A great manager speeds up the reaction between a employees’ talents and the company’s goals. The chapter introduces the four keys, which lays the foundation for the most substantial element of this book. The authors take the four core activities of a manager and share them through the lens of conventional wisdom and opposed to a manager who takes on the role of a catalyst in their company. Through conventional wisdom, managers select people based on experience, intelligence, and determination as opposed to *selecting someone for talent*, which is how a catalyst would conduct their business. Conventional wisdom suggests setting expectations by defining the right steps, as opposed to *defining the right outcomes*. Conventional wisdom says to motivate people by helping them identify and overcoming weakness, as opposed to *motivation by focusing on strengths*. Lastly, conventional wisdom says to develop the person by helping them

learn and get promoted, as opposed to helping them *find the right fit*, which may not necessarily be the next lateral step.

The third chapter delves into the first key, which is selecting for talent. The chapter spends a good chunk of time focusing on the definition of talent, types of talent and answering the questions about why talent is more important than experience, intelligence, and willpower. The authors discuss that the key is matching a person's talent and their role because talent cannot be taught and talent is unique to a worker. Without talent, the book suggests, there is no possibility of excellence.

The fourth chapter looks further into the second key, defining the right outcomes. They talk about the fact that as a manager, you do not have the ability to make much happen. That charge lies in the hands of the employees that report to you. As the leader, it is your job to motivate and influence. The authors identify four temptations of control that leaders face. These temptations, such as "trust is precious- it must be earned" and "some outcomes defy definition" do not allow workers to shine as a result of their unique talent. In these situations, they are being controlled instead of simply influenced and motivated. The authors also offer several rules of thumb for facilitating the transformation of talent into performance and productivity.

The fifth chapter is about the third key of focusing on strengths. This key suggests that great managers do not try and fix weaknesses. They develop strengths and cultivate talents and help people become more of what they are. This key also suggests that managers should be spending the most time with their most

productive employees, as this sends the message that they are going to invest in the best employees. Also, this key is about managing around weaknesses. They talk about how everyone has weaknesses and this will be necessary for every employee.

The sixth chapter discusses finding the right fit, the fourth key. This idea is about matching peoples' roles with their talents. The authors talk about how a person's success at a role on one level does not mean they will have success at the next level, suggesting that the way most people do and have done promotions for years, is useless.

Finally, the seventh chapter offers a guide for managers to use their own uniqueness as a leader to turn their employees' talents into performance.

How this book influences my philosophy as a leader

Prior to reading this book, I would have considered the previously mentioned four keys through the lens of conventional wisdom and assumed they were an effective way to lead. By slightly but pointedly changing these keys, I can clearly see how the new ideas create more effective and productive leaders and employees. For example, prior to reading this book I would have read the statement about selecting people based on experience, intelligence, and willpower and thought that it was a sure way to pick the best employee. Throughout this book, however, it becomes very clear that talent is really what drives great performance and is how we can distinguish between employees who are intelligent and competent and those who are truly great and able to contribute something special and needed to a company. These keys make so much sense to me and they are a strong framework to follow in order to build a great managerial style.

Working With Other Administrators

Working with other administrators seems to me to be a difficult part of the duties of a special education administrator. Administrators, without managing each other, have to work together towards common goals to create the most effective and successful school system possible. The ideas in this book can be a very effective way to run a business, or in this case a school district. With the buy-in and cooperation of all administrators, however, is how I think this approach would be most effective. Getting administrators on board with the interviewing approach discussed in chapter seven would be very important to me. The authors talk about a few guidelines that should be followed in order to interview for the most talented employees. The authors suggest several rules, such as making sure there is a “talent only” interview, where talent is the main focus as opposed to having an interview that combines the potential employee getting acquainted with the company, learning about their experience, etc. Also, the authors suggest asking open-ended questions and trying to keep quiet, listening for specifics in answers, looking for evidence of talent, and knowing what to actually listen for. We know that it is important to hire teachers with talent. Most hard working people can get through a teaching program, however not everyone is talented in the art of teaching. Getting other administrators on board with hiring the most talented people and conducting interviews which help facilitated this would be very crucial. ,

“By themselves, great managers can make small advances in the opposite direction, but they can never break all the way through to the other side,”

Buckingham and Coffman write, “sooner or later they open the door and find

convention standing there with some policy or rule or system that stops the great manager in his tracks” (235). Administrators have to be capable of working well with other administrators in a respectful way, while always keeping what is best for children at the top of their priority list. In my opinion, it is most important for an administrator to keep the most talented teachers and effective programming available and in front of their students. In chapter seven, which offers a practical guide for using the keys, the authors give ideas of how to break through conventional wisdom barricades while working with other managers. The authors suggest that keeping the focus on the outcomes, valuing great performances in every role, studying the best (i.e. studying and learn from the best employees in every role), and teaching the language of great managers is a powerful way to create an alternative to conventional wisdom while maintaining a friendly climate for managers and staff.

Supervising Special Education Staff

As a special education administrator, it will be my job to supervise and manage a staff of special education teachers and other support individuals. One point in this book that stuck out to me as being extremely useful in this area is when they talked about how great managers are not controllers and the ability to make things happen lies in the hands of the reporting staff. As a special education administrator, I need to have faith that I have hired the right people to do the right jobs. My job will not be to tell teachers and support staff exactly what to do. My job is to define the right outcomes and trust, with my influence and motivation, that the teachers reporting to me can artfully and uniquely put their talent to work and

create powerful performances in the classroom that lead to the highest levels of student engagement and learning.

Another important point in the book that will be useful as a special education administrator is selecting employees based on talent. The book suggests that great managers define talent as, “a recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.” This definition is important because it reaches beyond the traditional way we think about talent. It shows that talent, although often innate, can also be strategic. All special education teachers have been taught the technical side of education. Teachers are trained in educational law, individualized education plan process and procedures, however the true magic and art of teaching is going to come from the talent that teachers have and develop.

In the third key, focusing on strengths, there is a section about spending the most time with your best people. The authors suggest that investing time into your most skilled employees helps you see what employee excellence looks like. I believe it would be extremely important to invest quality time into the best teachers so that I know what desirable talent looks like. I believe you could present ten extremely talented teachers and their classrooms would all look different, their teaching styles would not be the same, and their strengths would differ as well. This is why I think it is important to spend time with teachers who are the most effective, because you may see personified talent that you did not previously identify as talent. I believe face time with teachers, as an administrator, is very important and I think it is crucial to remember to not ignore or “leave be” the teachers who are the most

effective/the most talented. This is where *your* learning of *what your students need and will benefit from* is going to happen.

By hiring people with talent, resisting the common temptations to control, and spending real time with those who are the strongest performers of their job, special education performance can certainly be improved.

Creating Successful Programs for Students

As a special education administrator, a big part of the job is to lead and manage teachers and other special education staff. However, we know the epitome of education is student growth. Throughout this book, I found myself making connections not only to my leadership style in regards to staffing issues, but also in regards to student performance.

When reading the twelve essential questions for determining a company's ability to attain, keep, and focus the most talented employees, I found myself wondering if these questions could be used with students to determine the strength of a school in terms of focusing and keeping student "buy-in". As we know, keeping our students interested and bought in to the educational process is key to their success in completing schooling. These questions, tweaked slightly for school language, etc., could be applied to our students as we would apply them to employees.

Another very relevant point that was easily relatable to working with and creating successful programs for students was the third key, which is about focusing on strengths. As special educators, we know that focusing on strengths is crucial to

the successful education of our students. On page 168 the authors write, “ The speediest cure for a debilitating weakness is a support system.” Building support into the education is something we tend to be good at in special education. This book, however, talks about the process of turning a weakness into a nontalent. By building a support system where there is weakness, you take away the negative affect the weakness has on the employee or, in this case, students, thus creating a simple nontalent out of a weakness. Then, it is just something the student does not excel at, instead of it being something that holds the student back.

Conclusion

This book truly changed my thinking. As a leader, I know I will take a lot of this thinking and use it to shape my personal leading style. As an administrator, my goal is also going to be to support the staff and students I work with to maximize learning and growth. I truly believe in the idea of creating a community of employees where everyone works together to combine their greatest strengths and create the most comprehensive, supportive, and effective programs for our students.

References

Buckingham, M., & Coffman, C. (1999). *First, break all the rules: What the world's greatest managers do differently*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.