

Learning To Be Comfortable With Discomfort

Article written by Incentive Services University

We can all identify the A players. On sports teams, they are the stellar athletes. They are recruited by top universities and professional teams. They are the standouts. They make multi-million dollar deals with endorsements and commercial contracts. And in business, they are often the deal-makers, the go-getters and the promotion-seekers.

In contrast, you may not notice the B players, in sports teams or in your business. But they are also there – day after day, consistently and conscientiously getting the work done. On a sports team, they are the solid, dependable players who deliver reliable results – game after game. In your business, they always execute.



Every day, companies are focusing more and more on the B players as they realize their untapped potential. As writer Del Jones points out, “the backbone of every company is in the middle where the ether of great thoughts is hammered into reality” (Employers Learning That ‘B’ Players Hold the Cards, 2009). But what drives the B Players may be significantly different than what drives the ‘A’ players. It’s not necessarily the fame, the money or even the position.

According to Jones, “. . . B players are embedded in both their jobs and in their communities.”

The difference is in temperament. There are many types of B players, but most are loyal (to a point), don’t live and die for the next promotion (but want challenging work), don’t need coddling (but can die of neglect), are honest (if not diplomatic) and are not as driven by power, status and money as are A players, who live for little else.

Companies should be looking for ways to address the needs of B players, says Jones, by recognizing their performance and their longevity. B players might just need different motivational incentives.

In addition, some B players want to be A players but are “risk averse”. They may be caught in the comfort zone (The Comfort Zone, Incentive Services University). The comfort zone is:

. . . that area of thought and action where a person feels uncomfortable. Anything we haven’t done or thought about often enough to feel comfortable doing lies outside the parameters of our comfort zone.

B players don’t necessarily seek out ‘uncomfortable’ situations. But they “. . . must learn to tolerate discomfort in order to grow, to maximize personal or organizational performance” (The Comfort Zone). Take the time to learn about what motivates your B players. How can you add a bit of discomfort to stretch their responsibilities and their goals? By learning to recognize your B players, you can maximize their potential and identify their drives and incentives for growth and improvement.

B players might just become your A players – if you can help them to expand their comfort zone.
