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The 'Dirty Dozen' Interview – Getting Loyal Lieutenants the First Step in Building your Management Team

This is adapted from the WWII movie. In the scene where the commando officer invites each of the residents of the death row prison to join him on a mission behind enemy lines. The offer is this: Come with me on this mission, where we have a 50% chance of getting back, and if we do get back, I'll get you off death row.
It underscores the fact that you need your lieutenants to get the job done, and they need you to take care of them. Owner/lieutenants relations are mutual dependence. The owner does not own them. Think of two mountain climbers on a rock face, connected by a rope. They are mutually dependant on each other. It is a personal bond. That is what you are seeking to create with your lieutenants.

The Dirty Dozen interview is a management tool to build loyalty with you luitentants. It's goal is that they should read you mind, and care for you so much, that they will 'take away' your problems even before you are aware of them.

Here is a story: Wellington, The British General who beat Napoleon, was scouting the battlefield prior to a battle, together with his group of general offices. At one point, on a scenic hilltop, Wellington dropped his glove, and his aide de camp got down from his horse, picked it up and handed it to him. There were some murmurs among the officers, who thought is was slavish behavior unbefitting a British officer. That evening, when summing up his orders for next days battle, Wellington turned to his aide de camp and instructed him to station a battalion of artillery at the spot where he had dropped his glove. The aide said: 'Your Grace, I have already done so.'

This process can and should be used anytime you as the owner, or manager, are aware of a problem, or challenge and you want someone to take care of it for you. It could me a major area, such as to "get us geared up for sales on the web", or a smaller one: "to get the reception area cleaned up". If it bugs you, it is probably important to the business.
So the first step is to figure out for yourself **What is the desired outcome?** What do you want that person to do for you? You should sit for a moment and define it for yourself in end results. In defining it, do not define how it will be done, just define what you want, when you need it, and how it should effect the company. Picture it clearly happening for yourself, so that you have a clear vision of how it should be. Now you are ready for the interview:

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There are 8 steps to this process.

- **The Invitation**
- "**I Have Problem**" describe it in personal terms
- **"I need your Help:** take care of this area for me
- **Let HIM talk,** and get a yes-no answer:
  (Listen, do not go get drawn into details, "good point, put it in your plan")
- **"I REALLY appreciate this ANYTHING I can do - let me know"**
- **"Use Phil as a resource** (as an afterthought), pick his brain".
- **END It,** Stand up, shake hands
- **On the way out: "**Think you can get me a rough plan? 2:00pm works?"

1. **The Invitation**: Send someone as a messenger, to invite the person to your office. Do not drop in on him yourself, or use the phone. Choose a time when they will be able to come, but don't ask them when they want to dot it. Do not specify WHY they are bring invited. They should come to your office wondering: is something the matter? The purpose of the invitation is to raise their blood pressure just a little bit. We do that by being a bit formal, sending a messenger, asking that it be now, and not providing a reason or explanation for the meeting.
2. When they come in, you should be seated behind your desk, have them close the door. This way you are re-enforcing the importance of the meeting (and raising the blood pressure). Take steps so there will not be interruptions, by letting the receptionist not to bother you, shutting off a cell phone. Make it confidential and important.

Now for the Interview:
Now that they have come, and are very alert, because it seems an important meeting (and maybe trouble), your next step is to convey that this is a friendly meeting. Despite the surprise call, it is not trouble, quite the opposite, they are being treated as equals, as partners, being brought to the seat of power to share it it. Have them sit, be friendly. Be natural, in whatever way fits your style and your relationship with that person. After a minimum of chit-chat, get tot the point:

3. "**I Have Problem**":

Describe in detail, why a certain area of the company is important, is key, and has become a personal problem area for you. Describe how the lack of something, or the existence of a barrier, creates problems for you, holds back the company, is keeping you awake at night or away from your spouse.

4. The language you use should be personal. Use personal examples. Be more open than you usually would be. Tell them how it bugs you. You are 'letting your hair down', or 'Opening the Kimono'. "Frank, you know since this recession began, and with sales

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down, I am out of my mind trying to raise cash to continue to operate. I am running around to banks, getting refused, and just going crazy. I'm not sleeping well, and my wife says it is getting to her." Again, you want to be more than usually open here. To confide in a way that the person will recognize that you are opening to them more than to others. Only by sharing 'damaging' or 'unflattering' information, with them, do you gain their trust. The dynamic is this: if I share uncomfortable facts (for me) with you, it means I trust you. Therefore, the you, the person who received this confidential information, usually reciprocates, and opens up as well. A dynamics of mutual trust starts to be established. This is key. So our lieutenant has just gone through a roller coaster ride: from being worried what he is being summoned for, to being taken into the confidence of the boss.

5. **"I need your Help: "**

"Frank, **I** need **your** help. **You** see, with all **my** time spent running around to banks, and dealing with raising cash and credit, sales are a mess. Would **you** be willing to take the area of sales on? Could **you** clean it up for **me** so that we hold on to our existing customers and start getting new ones? Do **you** think **you** could do that**?**

As you see, the request for help is personal. It is solidly based on the confidences we share just prior. So it flows from them naturally. It should not feel contrived. So use your own style and words. If you have shared your problem fully, and have been courageous in sharing personal things that might make your feel a bit vulnerable, then this request for help will be easy, natural and effective. If you were reserved, and kept the stuffy demeanor of the all powerful boss in the previous step, your asking for help will not be effective or natural.

The thing to watch our for, and stay away from are:

- What I need you to do for me is …..
- The company needs ……
- We are looking for you to ……

Stay away from taking the high moral ground, as in "fighting for democracy and motherhood". Saying 'this will save my life' is much more effective. We want to keep the tone personal, it is You and Him. Me and You. Help me and I'll owe you one. Notice that in the text above I have highlighted the words me and you. That is the language to use. Don't use corporate jargon, it means you are hiding form him, and do not trust him. So he won't trust you, and won't do his best for you.
In essence, what you are doing is saying: forget the corporate structure and all that, I need your help, let's watch out for each other. You are offering a partnership.

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6. **Now Shut Up – Now Let HIM talk**:
   If you continue talking past this point, after you have asked the question if he will help you, it will weaken your case. That is because if you go on talking, he will understand that you are not really offering a partnership, you just want a monologue and you are not really interested in what he feels or has to say. So it is very important, once the question is out, to shut up and look at him expectantly, and listen very intently and closely, with your full attention.

7. **What he will say – The Answer:**
   From the lieutenants perspective, this is often a dream come true. His boss has finally understood that he is the one he can confide in, he is the one who has what it takes to get things done, and it sure seems that he can look forward to moving ahead and being more influential in the company. Here are some likely first reactions:

   - You betcha, be happy to do it – This is a YES to your request. This is the most common reaction.
   - He may ask you questions, to try to clarify the rather general request you have asked him and put out feelers to see what you actually expect. The reason is that your wide, general and vague request worries him a bit, and he wants to pin you/itdown so he can be more comfortable with it.
   - He may equivocate, ask details, ask if it gets him a corner office, say he is backed up. In this case you have not gotten a firm YES. You can answer all his questions in a short manner and without committing. You can say that we can look at that, if he thinks it is important, and then come back to the question: do you want to take this on ?
   - The second most common reaction is for them to say: You know I've always thought…. And then for them to drag you into a working meeting, where they share all their ideas on the subject or problem you brought up. They will be very animated, happy and sharing. They will want to sit right down with you and begin getting it done. The reason for this is very simple. You have given them a large and ill defined problem. They aren't sure what it is exactly you want. They don't want to fail. So by having you there on their team, working together with them, they are perfectly safe. They will see where you are leaning, and exactly what it is you want, and will be able to direct their talk and actions accordingly. With you there, they can't go wrong. There is no risk for them. Plus, if they are working with you, in your office on it, they have immediate access to all resources you can call up. That is so much more than they usually have.

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- The problem for you, is that by going into a working meeting with them, you are wasting your time. Instead of them taking problems away from you and solving them for you, you are now stuck with solving their problems for them. If you go this route you will very quickly feel uncomfortable, and edge. You will feel you are wasting your time, because that is exactly what is happening.
- To avoid that, remember that the minute they enthusiastically bring up an 'idea' or suggestion, or start a working meeting type of conversation, - you smile benignly, say that is a great idea, and that they should include it in their plan. The idea is that you shed details, like a duck sheds water. Once they have agreed to taking the problem away from you, you want to go on to the next phase of the meeting, and get them out of your office and working on their own ASAP. The faster they are out of your office, The more effective the outcomes of this meeting will be, and the better for you.

8. **Thank you, I REALLY appreciate this, this is very important to me, if there is anything I can do to help - just let me know.**

Once you have a Yes, you want to acknowledge it. That firms it up. Shows them they made the right choice. The thank you, and the appreciation are your PERSONAL thanks. That is because he is going to be helping you. Don't make the mistake of switching now into Corporate language. You will lose all the special relations you have built up in the previous steps. You will lose their confidence. They will think that you were just putting on an act before, about the personal trust, and now that you have a YES, you are going back to a formal corporate relationship.

The second thing you want to do is to clearly signal that this is NOT the end of the personal relationship between you. You are saying this is important, a high priority for you. You are saying they can come directly to you if they need resources or help. You are giving them an inside line to you. This is the currency of power, of influence, and it is important to reward their trust in you, buy 'paying' them with access to you.

The last sentence is said in a way that sums up and is ending the interview. You now want to get them out of your office. So when you say thaks, you can start getting, up, shake their hand, clap them on the shoulder. But in all that, you are bringing it to a close, so that it does not deteriorate into a working meeting with you in it.

As you are getting up (or you could do it sitting, as long as it is sort of an afterthought) as a sort of afterthought, you are going to say two more things. Despite the fact that you are saying them standing up, as an afterthought, they are perhaps the most important items in this meeting:

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9. **You know, you can use Phil as a resource and pick his brain. He has a lot of experience in this (name the problem) area.** [if I am not present in the room, during the meeting, give him contact information, say you will ask me to call him, or in any other way, put him immediately and directly in touch with him. One way to do that is to call me with him in the room, or email me, and to ask me to be in touch with them and help them in solving this important problem. The mood should be friendly, cooperative; you are not ramming me down their throat. Just providing them with a resource.]

10. If I am present in the room, I will be 'hiding myself in a corner'. I will be unobtrusive. You should wave vaguely in my direction and say 'you know Phil', but do not make it a three way conversation. It is you and him. So sit facing him fully, don't turn half way in my direction. I just happen to be in the room. If I enter the conversation, take my cue. But don't involve me in it from your side. If he feels I am an important player in this conversation, it will weaken the bond between you two. I am most useful to you and to him as a resource, to help make him a hero to you by solving your problems.

11. **Now Stand up and Shake hands in a very warm way, and make noises that the interview is at a successful end and you are very satisfied. As you are standing up and moving to the door with him, you will ask for a deliverable:**

12. **Do you think you can get me a rough draft of a plan how to take care of it (the problem) say, by tomorrow afternoon? 2:00 ok for you?** (or if Phil is there, : Why don't you take Phil into a corner, pick his brain and come back with a rough outline that we can look at together at 2:00 ?)

    - The timeframe is short. You want him back in your office showing you his work in as short a time as possible. There are 2 reasons: You don't want him going off on a wrong tanget, you will have to correct him, he will waste his and your time, and when you do correct him, he will lose enthusiasm, and think you are not open to him using his creativity and his head, that you just want to do it your way.
    - Because the timeframe is short, we do not burden them with a lot. A rough draft, is good, not a polished presentation. It does not put them under unrealistic pressure. Besides, a rough draft is easier to tweak so it meets you needs, without seeming to trash a lot of their work.
    - Any remark from him asking for a different time, or to deliver something a bit different, you should accept if at all possible. Keep the friendly,trusting tone of the whole meeting. So the default answer to any time extention, or resources, or what he will be delivering is "Sure, yes".

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- But if he asks for a lot more time (because he wants to give you a very detailed plan, and because he is taking your request too seriously and thinking he has to do it all on this own), then gently minimize what he has do do: that's ok, just put down some general ideas, some bullet points we can look over', and ask him to do it in a short timeframe. And again, refer him to Phil, who could be a resource to save him time/work.

To sum up, here are the 8 steps to this process.

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Follow-up and the next meeting

Whenever the lieutenant returns to you, either to show you some preliminary plan and ideas, or ask for resources or a question, you will be tested and the process will either be derailed, or continue to quickly build a solid and loyal lieutenant for your. So here are a few pointers, but do not try to wing this, it requires additional info and coaching. In the first dirty dozen and follow up meetings, I will usually coach you prior to each meeting and debrief you right after them. Some things to remember:

- **Applaud, appreciate, & support.** No matter what he brings you. Find something concrete that is in the right direction, and point it out and say how happy you are. Even if he came back to you with a problem or empty hands, you can say, "you know I feel so much better now that you are actively taking care of this". You remain supportive and friendly. The analogy is a grandparent who is always so happy at what his grandkid does.
- **Continue to be flexible and generous** with resources, permissions and extending deadlines.

- **Always find something more he can do for you: "**this is great, do you think you can do this for the widget dept too?", or " wow, this is a great spreadsheet, could you get me and the bookkeeper copies?" , or "the first 3 items out of the 27 points are really fantastic, could you get me a schedule and budget for them?" (this is how you focus him on what you want, and get him away from items you are not interested in, without hurting his feelings).

- This request of yours now becomes the next deliverable. The action item that he goes away from you to do. Again, he must go away from you, and do it on his own. The actions and deliverables should be small baby steps. That way: he does not waste a lot of time and resources on something you do not want; He does not get discouraged; There is a good tempo, a feeling we are moving forward (in building our relation as well as the project at hand); and you can keep tabs on him and by suggestions and requests to guide his work so it is useful to you.
- **Set a due date:** for the deliverable. Keep it informal, suggestive. If he asks for more time, reduce the deliverable, but try to keep a close date. If he still asks for more time, give it to him.