

How to turn star players into a team

Barry Ferguson's spat at Rangers has lessons for all employers, says *Donna Reynolds*

MANY businesses believe that if they hire the right people, everything else will fall into place around them. However, differences in culture, work styles and personalities can cause problems for employers, as evidenced by the public fallout between Paul Le Guen and Barry Ferguson at Rangers.

Ferguson was one of the players inherited by Le Guen when he arrived at Ibrox last summer. This may have been an issue in itself. Football managers are generally adept at knowing exactly what they are looking for in a player and how each individual is required to complement and contribute to a team's style.

Businesses need to adopt this way of thinking if they want to be successful in their recruitment. With any new appointment there should be clarity on all sides about what is to be done, the rewards for doing it, the standards expected and the consequences of failing to meet those standards.

Businesses often suffer troublesome employees, with management feeling powerless to do anything. There is a distinction to be made here between a "difficult" employee and one that fails to perform his duties or flaunts company policy. Employers are on more solid ground in disciplining the latter than they are the former.

An employee might be good at their job and operate within the firm's rules, yet their personality may cause all manner of problems for management and colleagues alike. In such cases, implementing performance management measures or disciplinary procedures is not

necessarily appropriate and can actually be counter-productive, as evidenced in Le Guen's case by Ferguson's reaction to being dropped and the subsequent backlash. It may be more appropriate to discuss the perceived problem with the employee and seek to resolve matters that way before taking formal action.

There will be times when formal action by an employer is necessary. Problems left unresolved will affect the culture and effectiveness of the business and make it harder for an employer to deal with employee issues in the future.

Personality clashes alone cannot be fair grounds for dismissal. However, a dismissal might be considered to have been fair if there was a breakdown in the employer's confidence in an employee because his/her personality contributed to actual or potential damage being done to the employer's organisation. In this case, the employee should be warned and given the opportunity to change his behaviour and the employer must observe the statutory disciplinary procedures. We can only assume these procedures were observed during the unravelling of Le Guen and Ferguson's relationship.

Businesses can learn much from this. Firstly, contracts of employment should make

it clear that there is an expectation that the employee will conduct his work in a co-operative manner and to the best of his abilities. Contracts should also make allowances for an employer to alter an employee's duties in order to better achieve success for the business. Whether the stripping of Ferguson's captaincy amounts to a significant change in his duties is an interesting point, as is the question of whether it was a legitimate attempt to improve the team's performance.

Secondly, gossip in the workplace will be rife in cases of controversial management decisions, so employers must handle the process sensitively and appropriately. A decision with far-reaching and potentially damning repercussions should be discussed thoroughly by all concerned and the final decision should be taken by someone other than the member of management who initiated the complaint about the employee. It can be disastrous for a business to be divided on the treatment of an issue, as Le Guen has found to his cost.

Once a decision has been made, a judgment needs to be taken on what information should be shared with other employees and, where relevant, external parties. Building a team that gets on well will not guarantee success but it's a start. Every business needs a workforce that shares its focus on tactics and objectives, and management must be aware that decisions made today may affect results for a long time.

Rangers have learnt the hard way that creating a football team capable of challenging for trophies requires more than simply throwing a group of talented players together and appointing a manager with an impressive CV.

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Barry Ferguson: player had a poor relationship with his boss

