

Member's Quarterly

Summer 2020 Edition

President's Message

Perseverance: Better than Intelligence?

Look for it in new employees

Some of the greatest victories in sport and on the battlefield have been achieved by persevering against all odds. The world of work is full of many failed attempts before an eventual success. One of the best-known examples of perseverance is the inventor Thomas Edison. After a multitude of failures to create an electric light bulb, he was apparently asked if he was ready to give up. His reply was "I haven't failed, I've identified 10,000 ways that don't work."

The value of perseverance can never be underestimated. Now some HR experts believe that it may be even better than intelligence as a trait to look for in new hires. There's no question that brains will take you a long way at work and we all love those best and brightest new recruits. But the research is starting to show that those who show passion plus perseverance and the ability to push through difficult challenges might actually outperform the smartest people in the room.

This may be because those highly intelligent people have learned to get by on their brainpower alone. They do extremely well in school and university because those systems are highly structured and less complex. But when they get into the workplace and face adversity (which is the new norm), they retreat because they lack the confidence or resiliency to work through the many challenges to reach a solution. In fact, they often get frustrated and give up or avoid certain tasks.

This also shows up when a new employee is asked to learn a new skill or process, or to do things the 'way we've always done them' at your organization. That's not easy for anyone. Those who have learned to persevere in other aspects of their lives will find a way to keep going until they get it. One more thing that favours perseverance over intelligence is that your brain is almost useless when it comes to managing stress and anxiety. In fact, in many cases, it causes more problems to think about something and only makes you more anxious. The quality that people with high perseverance have is that they are less likely to panic when it gets difficult because they have learned to stick with it until it starts getting easier.

Maybe we should be testing for perseverance as well as intelligence when we hire new employees. Albert Einstein once said, "It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."

Brian Pascal is President of IPM [Institute of Professional Management].



Brian W. Pascal
RPR, CMP, RPT
President