The June, 2003 issue of the Harvard Business Review contains an outstanding article entitled, *Let’s Hear it for B Players*. It describes average performers as “the best supporting actors of the business world.” As in any production, there are the stars and the supporting players. It doesn’t make the role of the latter any less important to the successful outcome of the performance. The same holds true in the world of work. There is a necessary and critical balance between your superstars and B players.

Here are a few key points to think about:

B players are not necessarily less intelligent than A players. Achievement is a blend of several factors including motivation and personality in addition to intelligence. Research shows that A and B players differ at least as much in temperament as in intelligence.

B players seek opportunities for advancement but not at the expense of work-family balance. This can be used to the advantage of businesses that recognize that A players strive for advancement at all costs and, therefore, are less loyal to their employers than B players. Allowing the B player room to create balance in his or her life will lead to increased likelihood of long-term employment.

B players are often “recovering” A players. That is, they are A players who climbed off the merry-go-round in search of more personal fulfillment. This makes them valuable in terms of their experience and know-how – *provided* they are managed properly.

B players may also be “truth tellers” – people who are obsessed with honesty and reality in their interactions with superiors. Most often these are functional experts who don’t possess (or refuse to display) the political savvy necessary to put them on the A list, but who do play an important organizational role. They are willing to ask the tough questions that others often won’t and, because they’re not competitive in the usual sense, others are willing to go to them for technical advice.

B players are sometimes “middling” employees – less competent than not only A players, but also other B players. Don’t be quick to judge them as not having value, though. They are needed for their willingness to truly serve the organization, their sense of responsibility to the job, and their commitment to the organization’s values.

B players need to be rewarded in ways different than A players. Since they aren’t promoted as frequently, reinforcement in the form of written thanks, giving them choices, and spending time with them can serve to keep them motivated and prevent them from becoming C players.

I encourage you to read the entire article if you’re interested in learning more about the value of B players. It can be ordered online at [www.harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu](http://www.harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu) and the reprint number is R0306F.

Best regards,

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