

A man in a dark suit and glasses is sitting on a large, white, maze-like structure made of concrete or stone. The maze is set on a grassy area. The man is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a dark, textured surface with diagonal lines.

WHAT THE BEST DO DIFFERENTLY

Decades of Gallup research have shown that great managers possess a unique combination of natural talents. Jerry Rudzinski and Lanell Jacobs are both incredible examples of these talents in action. They are also a testament to the fact that although great managers share a common set of talents, there is a uniqueness in the way each person exhibits and works with his or her innate gifts.

WINNING COMBO: A DEDICATION TO TALENT AND A FOCUS ON RESULTS

Jerry Rudzinski, Senior Director of Sales, Patient Handling Division, Stryker Medical

As a starting outside linebacker for the Ohio State Buckeyes in the late 1990s, Jerry Rudzinski relied on a few core convictions to drive success on and off the field. An article in The Ohio State University's student publication on Rudzinski from that time highlights one such principle as part of his upbringing: *Focus on the fundamentals*.

Focusing on the fundamentals has continued to serve Rudzinski well in his career at Stryker, one of the world's leading medical technology companies. As senior director of sales for the company's Patient Handling division, Rudzinski heads the management team for a nationwide sales force of 11 region managers and 112 sales representatives.

Under Rudzinski's leadership, his sales team has exceeded expectations, delivering double-digit growth in three of the past four years. The team also posted one of the highest sales force employee engagement scores in the company. So when Gallup was reviewing nominees for the inaugural Manager of the Year award, which was presented at the 2014 Gallup Great Workplace Awards (GGWA), Rudzinski's name rose to the top of the list.

In considering his achievements over 14 years with Stryker, Rudzinski returns to his emphasis on the fundamental conditions for success. "There's something about staying grounded in the basics that makes you feel confident as you move forward with any project or initiative," Rudzinski says. In his current role, those basics are similar to those of any successful coach: Recruit people with high-level talent for the job and continually develop them to make the most of their talent.

“[Receiving] the [Manager of the Year] award was particularly fulfilling for Jerry because he really is a student of talent,” says Don Payerle, the vice president and general manager, Patient Handling and EMS. “He loves finding [talent], he loves coaching it, and he loves developing it.” Payerle describes Rudzinski’s ability to recruit people with world-class talent and learn about what motivates them as individuals, then challenge them with high but achievable expectations.

A “TALENT OFFENSE” DRIVES SUCCESS

Rudzinski’s success as a manager represents a way of effectively executing Stryker’s broader performance strategy, which incorporates several of Gallup’s practices. The first practice is talent assessment using selection profiles in hiring sales representatives and sales managers. Stryker also uses Gallup’s Q¹² employee engagement survey to gauge the extent to which employees feel involved in and enthusiastic about their work and to create interventions at the workgroup and enterprise levels to systematically improve their engagement. Stryker relies on great managers to make its performance strategy work and to ensure that employees are thriving in their careers.

Several executive leaders are typically present at each workgroup’s Q¹² feedback session, during which employees and managers meet to discuss the survey results. Rudzinski attends 13 sessions per year and says that senior leaders often attend many more than that. Managers and leaders clarify that each session’s purpose is to make the organization better, and to achieve that goal, it is important that everyone feels free to speak up.

“History would suggest that forthright feedback is harmless in these sessions, and people accept that,” Rudzinski says. “Our employees care about their work, so the positive cycle of communication continues.”

COMMUNICATING AND WINNING

For Rudzinski, constant communication with his team members helps ensure that their talents are well-supported and running at high capacity. “It’s a simple formula,” he says. “Talk to your sales force to see what’s going well for them and where we’re disappointing them. If you ask those questions and listen carefully to the answers, you’ll be able to make incremental improvements along the way that a spreadsheet or market analysis simply can’t give you.”

Maintaining a strong level of communication is particularly challenging for a team like Rudzinski’s, whose region managers each oversee a group of sales reps who work remotely and rarely see one another in person. Managers must make the most of every connection with their team members, whether in person, over the phone or otherwise. They join their reps in “ride-alongs,” and they often use Gallup’s strengths-based management coaching materials to understand how best to engage each employee individually.

Rudzinski stresses the importance of selecting region managers who are naturally strong communicators and relationship builders. Those managers help promote the team’s success, and celebrating the team’s accomplishments further boosts engagement. “The key is

communication and winning. One without the other is a dead end,” Rudzinski says. “It is tough to build camaraderie in the dark. It is also tough to spread goodwill when there are no positives.”

EXPECTING THE BEST FROM PEOPLE

Given Rudzinski’s success at coaching and building strong relationships with his team members, it might be natural to assume his strengths are primarily relationship-oriented. But Rudzinski’s top five talent themes — based on the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment, Gallup’s taxonomy of 34 themes — are Competition, Maximizer, Focus, Achiever and Significance. These themes point to someone whose primary motivation is delivering results.

“Winning is where Jerry likes to be,” says Jeannie Ruhlman, a Gallup senior consultant who serves as Rudzinski’s strengths performance coach. “He has Competition and Significance in his top five themes, but he plays that down because he embraces a servant-leadership orientation. He expects the best from his people, but he also expects the best *for* his people. That’s one of the many reasons people want to work for him.”

Rudzinski says his goal orientation pervades everything he does at Stryker. “I want to be part of the greatest company in the world, and that’s the end in my mind. Everything we do, every agenda we set, every customer we talk to, every meeting we plan — we’re going to have that end in mind.”

Like many world-class managers, Rudzinski has a personal take on his role at the company, recognizing the influence he can have on his team members’ well-being. “Lives change in the working world when the right manager enters someone’s life,” he says. “My father’s life — and consequently, our family’s lives — changed because a great manager entered his life. My life changed when a certain manager entered my life. To me, it’s inspiring to know that the region managers and directors who I work with could potentially change somebody’s life by getting up in the morning and heading off to put in a good day’s work.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Lanell Jacobs, Director, Harris Radiation Therapy Cancer Center at Gordon Hospital

People who work in healthcare often say they were called to it. They are natural caregivers who have a unique ability to help patients and their family members navigate life's most difficult moments. And they have an innate understanding of and appreciation for what it means to provide "treatment," recognizing that it almost always goes beyond the physical illness or injury.

As a cancer survivor, Lanell Jacobs understands firsthand what patients need from their care team. And as the director of the Harris Radiation Therapy Cancer Center at Gordon Hospital, she is dedicated to making sure they receive it. Jacobs says, "When patients leave our facility, the biggest win I can have is hearing them say they got what they needed here — physically, emotionally and spiritually."

Located in Calhoun, Georgia, Gordon Hospital operates as part of Adventist Health System and serves patients with high-quality, personalized and compassionate care. Jacobs oversees a team of 16 people in the hospital's cancer center, including 15 staff members and one physician. This team tends to patients with various treatment plans: Some undergo radiation therapy every day for six to eight weeks, others receive 10 treatments over the course of a few weeks, and some need late-stage cancer (palliative care) support.

The work that Jacobs' staff performs is often demanding and draining. On top of that, they operate in an industry that is constantly changing and increasingly competitive. It is understood that the right manager is vital to ensuring that team members stay emotionally and psychologically committed to their jobs — and Jacobs has more than risen to the challenge. In 2013, Jacobs' employee engagement scores put her in the top 10% of workgroups in Gallup's database.

Jacobs' success can be credited to many factors, but perhaps the greatest among them is her commitment to leading by example. She is passionate about providing every patient at the cancer center with holistic care and managing her team with a similar philosophy in mind. She cares for her employees as people, paying close attention to both their professional and personal needs. Because of this, she has been able to fully engage her team in the ministry of treating individuals and providing support for family members.

A TEAM ON A MISSION

Two years ago, Jacobs had the unique opportunity to help design Gordon Hospital's new cancer center and hire the facility's first team. Before the center opened, she held several meetings with her employees to discuss the standard training protocols and orientation topics, and to lay the groundwork for how they would operate together as a team. She believed it was crucial to develop a team mission that would help everyone understand what they were trying to accomplish and keep them moving in the same direction.

Jacobs also believed that a team mission would serve another purpose. She knew that her employees would have days that were emotionally and mentally exhausting, and she wanted their mission to be a source of inspiration and reassurance in those stressful moments. “A mission brings people together, and it gives them something to come back to, especially when things get difficult or seem overwhelming,” Jacobs says. “The mission allows them to persist through.”

Ultimately, the team landed on “Be the best at what we do — always with compassion” as its mission. This mission is closely connected to the larger missions of Adventist Health System and Gordon Hospital, and through it, Jacobs leads a staff that is highly focused on providing safe, quality care with a personal touch. Every morning, for example, they gather for a huddle to discuss the standard patient updates, go over hospital announcements and generally plan their day, but they also take the time to pray for each patient by name. The simple but profound gesture is a testament to the way Jacobs helps her team live its mission every day.

CREATING TRUST THROUGH RECOGNITION, COMMUNICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Jacobs has been with Adventist Health System for a little more than a decade, working as a psychiatric nurse before taking on the director position at Gordon Hospital. She credits her years in the mental health field with helping her develop an in-depth understanding of human behavior and motivation. She realizes that her employees have an intrinsic need to be recognized and cared for as people. Because of this, Jacobs is diligent about rounding with her team members every day, using the one-on-one time to check on not only their work-related needs, but also their personal well-being.

Communication and personal acknowledgement go far in creating trust — something Jacobs believes is crucial to her team’s development and engagement. She elaborates, “The most important part of building a team is trust. I have to trust them, and they have to trust me. I am present, approachable and involved, and I recognize what each person is doing well.”

Trust is a two-way street, and while Jacobs holds herself accountable as a leader, she also holds her staff members accountable for their roles. She ensures that each team member understands the responsibilities of his or her job and is performing to those expectations. Holistic healthcare is paramount at Gordon Hospital and the cancer center, and Jacobs pays special attention to the way her staff administers care. She hires for talent and then coaches all of her employees — regardless of their role — to be involved in all of a patient’s activities to treat the whole person.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Nearly every great manager can point to someone in his or her past as the inspiration for his or her management style. For Jacobs, that person is a previous CEO at another Adventist Health System facility she worked at in Florida. Before stepping into her first manager role, Jacobs had transitioned from her job as a mental health nurse to more of an educational role. She hadn’t considered moving into management until the CEO at the time encouraged her to do so. “He believed in me,” she says. “He told me that he would train me.”

She considered the CEO to be a mentor and made the same commitment to developing her people that he made to developing her. She looks for employees with the talent to do the job and then helps them cultivate their strengths to grow in their role. And just as importantly, she believes in them, just like her mentor believed in her. In much the same way that the cancer center is a healthy environment for patients to get the care they need, it is as much a healthy environment for the center's staff to get the support they need to do their very best work. 