



‘Simon Says’

Issue 15 – August/ September 2014



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Top Grading is the silver bullet to professional success and emotional wellbeing

We live in an era of lightning speed knowledge transfer where new pricing, product and delivery methods can all be duplicated and copied in a heartbeat. In a highly competitive market, how do you continue to deliver competitive advantage for your company? The answer lies in attracting, retaining and developing A grade Talent.

What is Top Grading?

Top Grading is a reframing of the A B C grading philosophy that we all became intimately familiar with while fumbling our way through the school education system. Traditionally, our experience taught us to recognise that:

- A** - Represents exceptional performance.
- B** - Solid grasp with room for improvement.
- C** - Average result, scraped through unit – thank goodness that was close!

Top Grading is a proven approach that applies logical and systematic thinking and a simple ranking system to gain competitive advantage through people. It is readily applied to many business functions including inventory control, assessing financial risk and customer segmentation; however it has been drastically underutilised as a Talent Benchmarking tool. In applying Top Grading to your employees, the system works like this:

- A** - Still represents exceptional performance however this is the expected standard from everyone.
- B** - Is working towards being an A or may need reevaluation of their role to create a better match with skills and strengths.
- C** - Clearly in the wrong job. Consistently and respectfully support B and C performers through redeployment or manage them out.

Top Grading creates competitive advantage and guarantees personal career success

Leaders sometimes make the mistake of assuming that to be classified as an A grader you have to be on a career fast track and pushing for promotion. While this is the case for some, an A grader can simply be someone who is exceptional in their role. Interestingly most organisations tend to avoid strategies that focus solely on A Grade recruitment, linking it to the risk of creating a revolving door of earnest overachievers who battle valiantly over crumbs of opportunity. ‘A’ grade talent fits 3 profiles: strategists, continuous improvers and maintainers and they are all an absolute necessity for organisational balance.

The blending of personalities, skill sets and ambition in the workplace is something leaders engaged in Top Grading should have front of mind if they want to achieve the right team mix. A systematic and relentless pursuit of filling your organisation with A grade talent is at the heart of successful Top Grading and it requires the mastery of the A, B, C grading system, along with the application of some simple guiding principles.

The 7 essential principles for Top Grading success

1. The CEO must be on board. Top grading is absolutely a top down process.
2. Measure Top Grading results and failure rates and hold hiring managers accountable for these.
3. Advocate for a proactive rather than a ‘break/fix’ mentality to Talent sourcing.
4. Only Target the Top 10% of candidates when recruiting for a position and ensure a clear performance profile sets the benchmark.
5. Create a compelling vision and story for the position you seek to fill. For example, in targeting an A grade Change Agent/Improver, use action words and terminology that resonates such as, growth focus, continuous improvement, career fast track.
6. Become a master of interview assessment and coaching. Top Grading experts are trained to identify A grade talent at a 90% success rate.
7. Embed a respectful culture of accountability, ownership and performance management. Like attracts like.



A leader who consistently surrounds themselves with B and C players will find their valuable time is consumed in firefighting, dealing with systems errors, disgruntled

customers and a litany of other unexpected issues. They will almost certainly struggle to match the competition within their sector. In mastering and implementing a culture and commitment of Top Grading, you will be afforded more time to focus on high end strategic priorities and add value through coaching and people development. Perhaps most satisfying is the freedom you will be guaranteed to enjoy a more personally fulfilling career as you can spend more time doing the work you love.

August/September FREE offer for our valued network: Download your FREE copy of Simon’s full White Paper: **Top Grading is the silver bullet to professional success and emotional wellbeing** at www.edwardgeorge.com.au > Services > Resources.

Edward George specialises in Top Grading training techniques and robust Executive Recruitment and Outplacement Services. We assist organisations to embed a Top Grading culture and create a structure that supports the Top Grading process. For a free no obligation consultation, please call Edward George on **08 9457 4566** or email us at perth@edwardgeorge.com.au Simon Stibbs is the Managing Director of Edward George Pty Ltd.