

When the Perfect Fit Doesn't Fit:

Embracing Flexibility in the Workplace

By Patty Sipes



Have you ever been deep into a project, only to realize something's just...off? You've organized each phase, you've assembled exactly what should work—but for some reason, it won't come together as planned. It feels like everything is correct, yet you're somehow forcing the pieces. The problem often lies in an overlooked perspective or a rigid mindset that needs a quick “flip.”

Seeing What's Missing

A common mistake is getting so attached to one approach that you never think to view things from another angle. Sometimes, you need to take a step back, flip the entire plan, or question your initial assumptions. That fresh perspective can spell the difference between feeling stuck and discovering a breakthrough.

A Real-World Example

Not long ago, I worked with an employee who clearly had the talent, dedication, and drive to excel—but she was under constant stress in her role. After multiple one-on-one meetings, she finally admitted that her position was causing her anxiety and that she worried I might fire her. In reality, she was simply in the wrong seat on the bus, to borrow Jim Collins's famous phrase.

Rather than part ways with a potentially stellar contributor, we found an alternative spot for her within the organization. The catch: she had to earn it on her own merit. But once she secured the new role, everything clicked. She thrived, the team's morale improved, and we filled her old position with someone better suited for it. One small shift—one “flip” in perspective—turned a high-stress scenario into a win-win solution.

Why Flexibility Matters

1. **Retaining Valuable Talent:** People aren't interchangeable cogs. A brilliant individual in the wrong role can become disillusioned, but placed properly, they'll shine.

2. **Boosting Morale:** When leaders show they're willing to adjust and adapt, it builds trust and fosters an atmosphere of collaboration and openness.
3. **Enhancing Productivity:** A well-aligned team works efficiently. When every person's strengths are utilized in the right way, projects flow with fewer bottlenecks and miscommunications.
4. **Encouraging Innovation:** Rigid thinking often stifles creativity. Embracing new perspectives can lead to fresh ideas and approaches that help you stay ahead of the curve.

How to Cultivate Strategic Flexibility

1. **Regular Checkpoints:** Schedule frequent touchpoints with individuals and teams. Ask what's working, what's not, and whether they're truly in a role that plays to their strengths.
2. **Open Communication:** Encourage employees to speak candidly about their goals, challenges, and preferences. The best realignment ideas often come directly from your team members.
3. **Willingness to Experiment:** If something isn't clicking, don't hesitate to test alternatives—whether that's a different project, a new process, or a departmental shift.
4. **Learn to Laugh at Missteps:** Sometimes, you'll only realize something is upside down or backward after spending too much time trying to force a solution. Laughing about these moments diffuses tension and fosters resilience.

A Sense of Humor Goes a Long Way

Acknowledging that you might have missed an obvious solution isn't just humbling, it can be a relief. Leaders who admit their own "aha!" moments encourage a culture where it's okay to recognize mistakes and pivot quickly. Lightening the mood when things go awry can re-energize the team and refocus everyone on finding the right fit.

Learn More

If you're curious about making strategic flexibility a core part of your leadership approach—or simply want to explore more practical strategies for building a resilient team—check out my new book; "It's Upside Down: The Surprising Business Wisdom Found in a Jigsaw Puzzle" (<https://a.co/d/iHv4Vw7>) – amazon link

It's filled with insights on aligning people's strengths with the organization's goals, knowing when to adapt, and discovering breakthroughs in the most surprising ways. Grab your copy and get ready to see challenges from a whole new angle!