HUNTING IN A FARMER'S WORLD

Appreciating the differences in our work styles

BY JOHN F. DINI

In business, you are either a hunter or a farmer. The working style that fits you best isn't really a matter of choice, nor is it determined by your job description. It is ingrained by eons of cultural evolution.

The Need Evolves

The hunter and farmer have markedly different working styles. Hunters are linear. It is their nature to focus on the kill. A hunter moves toward a goal, and on reaching it begins to immediately look for another objective to accomplish. On the other hand, a farmer's work is cyclical, tracking the seasons from planting to harvest.

Thousands of years ago, hunting was the only way we could survive. Those whose job it was to hunt for the tribe knew that failure wasn't an option. They persevered through fatigue and bad weather until they had accomplished the objective—bringing home food for everyone.

As people started farming and domesticating animals, tribes could settle in one place, build permanent living quarters and begin developing societies. Skilled workers could specialize in pottery or tool-making, and tribes began trading goods with each other. Hunting kept people alive, but farming built civilizations. As villages grew into cities, the majority of their populations became involved

in growing, transporting and distributing agricultural products. Hunting was relegated to a sport.

The cyclical nature of farming, tilling, sowing, tending and harvesting have morphed into the business cycle of planning, budgeting, implementation and measuring the results. Much like how the majority of our ancestors focused on farming, today's majority of employees are dedicated to production, along with managing and tracking the production of others. Hunting is left to a small minority—the entrepreneurs, salespeople, executives and creative talent whose jobs are to look ahead and focus on the next objective.

Appreciating the Differences

For business owners and leaders, the challenge is to support the linear attitudes of a hunter in a business environment that concentrates on the cyclical tasks of farming. Computerization has given managers exponentially more data to track and measure. By its nature, management is akin to farming, and management books promote farming methodologies. While these are valuable tools, for the typical hunter, they pose a problem—they are boring.

Hunters in management spend countless hours trying to master the intricacies of process and procedure without understanding why they are doomed to fail. They start to implement an initiative, but then are drawn to the next big thing, or simply lose interest in the effort and let things slide. They aren't excited by the potential for incremental improvement, but rather by the newness of the latest management fad. They enjoy building new things, but don't fare as well in managing them.

Are We in the Wrong Jobs?

The real problem is letting dynamic, creative problem solvers waste time and energy trying to adopt a style that doesn't suit them. How much more productive could your business be if everyone, including you, worked only on things they enjoyed?

An example is that of a top salesperson who is promoted to sales manager. The salesperson is a hunter who enjoys working independently and "bringing the meat" of a closed deal. It isn't hard to understand why moving them into a management role is counterproductive. A hunter has no inclination to oversee the work of others, prepare reports or think about improving the sales process. This person wants to hunt, and managing is the farthest thing from it.

Of course, the opposite is also true. Take the case of a controller who has advanced to chief financial officer. As a controller, they were focused on details and deadlines. Measuring and analyzing were their core competencies. Now faced with big picture tasks like forecasting, projecting and seeking new financial opportunities, they become lost. The mere fact that both positions involve financial skills doesn't make them interchangeable.

Most job descriptions involve a mix of hunting and farming. A job recruiter I know once remarked that, "When job descriptions require strength in both styles, you begin seeking a 'flying mermaid' to fill the position." That's someone who is willing to do detailed and repetitive work all morning, such as balancing accounts and data entry, then shift to an aggressive sales job in the afternoon. Even if you could find someone willing to take on a flying mermaid job, the odds of achieving success in both roles are nil.

The Pitfalls in Hiring

Farmers far outnumber hunters in most organizations. Regardless of the organization's senior management style, it's a mistake to seek out similar people for management responsibility. While we might prefer to interact with people who understand us, duplicated personality traits come with two pitfalls.

The first is when your decision-making team always agrees on a course of action. It might be because it's the best decision or maybe you just have the same point of view, but having someone who sees things differently on your team creates better debate and more options. And two hunters together may skip critical details, while two farmers could be putting too much emphasis on avoiding risk.

The second pitfall is that the managerial duties you tend to shun personally will likely not receive much attention from your key manager. Two farmers might focus on process over marketing initiatives, and two hunters might spend their time driving sales without looking at production efficiencies.

> **"A hunter has no inclination to oversee the work of others..."**

Hunters have always needed farmers. They keep things together when the hunter is off chasing the next objective and make incremental improvements through the business cycle. Farmers depend on hunters to create new opportunities and develop a long-term vision. Both are necessary, and neither is nearly as effective without the other.

To find out whether you are a hunter or a farmer, a fun and quick five-minute quiz is available online at www.hiafw.com. Take it and encourage your employees to do the same. It leads to fruitful conversations about what employees enjoy about their job and what they struggle with. Most of the time, a simple rearrangement of duties can deliver surprisingly outstanding results. ✪

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