

Evaluating Employee Performance

Caterpillars, Mules, Puppies, or Retrievers—Who is Working for You?

By Jeri Mae Rowley

Want to know who is really working for you? Try this fundamental formula to evaluate employee performance: **Systems + Ability + Effort = Performance Results.**

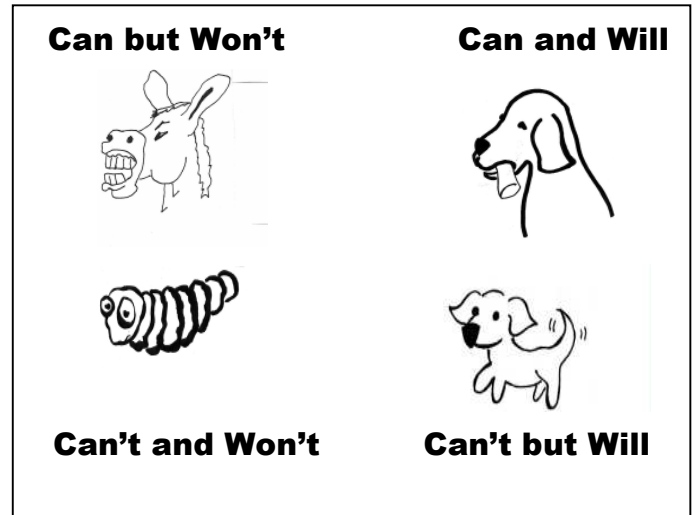
Systems The process, procedures, technology and resources essential to achieve results are systems. If systems are lacking, it is often out of the employee's authority to fix. So, assess systems separately from performance achieved through the employee's ability and effort.

Mind the Gap Any gap between the potential productivity of an employee and their actual performance should be studied to identify the root cause(s) of this discrepancy. What is getting in the way of this employee achieving their full potential? Does the employee lack the ability to do the job? Are they unwilling to perform well? Or both? Is it a weak system, or something else outside of the employee's control?

The **Performance Evaluation Grid** plots the employee's "ability" and "effort." On the vertical axis is "ability," which is defined as the "skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to achieve results." Ability is the **Can-Do** aspect of an employee's performance. On the horizontal axis is "effort," or the "actual behaviors and activities required to achieve results." Effort is the **Will-Do** of performance.

Evaluating Effort vs. Ability Evaluate all the tasks the employee performs in their job. For each task, what level of effort and ability identifies their placement on the **Performance Evaluation Grid**? And, is there one quadrant that characterizes their overall performance?

Most of us are actually in two or three quadrants at any given time. However, there tends to be a quadrant that describes our overall job performance.



Retrievers This employee has the natural talents, learned skills, desire, and willingness to do their job well. Our goal is to grow each employee into the "Retriever" quadrant and continue to provide them with challenges and achievements that encourage continuous learning and growth. We want to recruit, reward and retain Retrievers!

Retrievers show you what level of performance is possible. Any performance below this level exists because you are choosing to tolerate it.

Note: If you have a Retriever who is not achieving results, look for the "systems" that may be getting in this "willing and able" employee's way. Or, it may be a challenge outside of the work environment. Extend support to the Retriever. They might not come to you with their problems. Retrievers aren't used to needing, or asking for, help.

Puppies Puppies have Retriever effort and attitude but need assistance with ability. Our goal is to grow them into Retrievers by tapping into their willingness and helping them overcome gaps in confidence and competence.

If you hire or promote a Puppy, be sure that they receive sufficient support and direction right from the start. Puppies are ideal for training, mentoring, and job shadowing. Sometimes the greatest challenge with Puppies is holding them back until they are *really* ready. We want to set them up for success.

Mules Mules won't perform BUT THEY COULD IF THEY WANTED TO! The only thing missing here is effort. Because Mules have the ability, the key gap between current productivity and high performance is their choice not to perform.

What does it take to motivate a Mule? They won't change if they know you are willing to tolerate their lack of effort. The word motivation comes from the Latin, "*movere*," which means **to move**. People are only motivated when there is an uncomfortable disparity between where *they are* and where *they want to be*. Make sure your Mules can only get where *they want to be* by matching the effort of your Retrievers.

Caterpillars Caterpillar performance indicates the employee doesn't have the ability and doesn't make the effort.

Caterpillars really make us wonder about our organization's "systems." How did we get this employee? Did we hire a Puppy or Retriever and our culture or systems turned them into a Caterpillar? Or, were they Caterpillars to begin with? If so, what did the job announcement read? "*Are you a non producer, insubordinate, unmotivated, willing to let others carry the load for you? If so please apply to...*"

Sometimes an individual, who is placed in the wrong position for their abilities, gets frustrated and quits trying. But their performance might excel if placed in another position, or working in a different system.

In nature, caterpillars can change into butterflies. That's why low ability/low effort employees are labeled as Caterpillars [not Slugs] in this grid. Hopefully, in the right job—maybe in a different organization—these Caterpillars could transform into Retrievers.

Blissful Mediocrity Warning! Be aware of what you are tolerating in your organization. If Mules and Caterpillars are allowed to be continuous non-performers, it promotes an organizational culture of "blissful mediocrity." Mules and Caterpillars are blissful because they don't have to do what they don't want to do.

Puppies and Retrievers are smart. Sensing the unfairness and personal costs of always carrying the load abandoned by Mules and Caterpillars, our super willing employees lose their motivation to keep putting in the extra effort. They turn into Mules or Caterpillars. Or, they move on to be a Retriever in another organization.

The **Performance Evaluation Grid** reveals what you are tolerating and the gaps between the potential of each employee and their actual productivity. By evaluating the employee's performance separately from systems we are able to focus the employee's "effort" and "ability." The minimum standard for performance has been set by the Retrievers who have shown us what is possible with the right combination of ability and effort.

Who is Working for You? Who is really working for you—Mules, Caterpillars, Puppies or Retrievers?

Jeri Mae Rowley, MS Human Resource Management This professional speaker, master trainer and saddle maker's daughter delights audiences with her unique brand of "**Western Wit and Wisdom for the Workplace.**" You are invited to share this complete article with others. For more articles and resources, please visit her website: www.jerimaerowley.com.