
What the Experts are Saying



Amy Grubb

About Amy Grubb

Amy Grubb, Ph.D. is the Senior Director, Organizational Development and Talent at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). She has been leading change and presenting the story of the FBI through its employees for nearly 20 years. Amy is an internationally acclaimed speaker who has presented numerous workshops and plenaries on leadership, change, working with others, engagement, organizational culture, and storytelling.

Using Talents at Work

In general, people get an inherent satisfaction from contributing to an organization in a meaningful way, and this is usually very evident in National Security roles, where the “common good” and serving the country become huge drivers and motivators for people. Most people are passionate about what they do and are proud of their accomplishments and knowledge and experience. As such, when people feel like they aren’t being utilized as well as they could be --- that translates to feeling stifled or not being able to serve their country or meet the common good as well as they can. And that leads to frustration, because they know they *can* be doing more, but are being “prevented” from doing so. Some tips for leaders and employees in thinking about these results and how to work through leveraging talent well:

- It is easy for employees to be “labeled” based on extremes --- some really great work they did in the past or a project that went bad. But most people are not the definition of their extreme, and likely have skills, talents, and values that can be used other ways within the organization in a productive way.
- There are often assumptions made that since you are a circle, you are always a circle, but if asked, you could easily be an oval and wouldn’t mind being a triangle with slightly rounded corners. Sometimes employees have to take matters into their own hands to show they can be a triangle or a close approximation of one instead of only being seen as a circle.
- Sometimes work itself is “bucketed” in ways that prevent people with talents and experiences that if it was conceptualized just slightly differently, would be a better fit. Think about how workflow and processes and even billets/positions are grouped together --- are there ways of re-allocating or changing the work a bit to maybe fit the “pieces” differently or better?

- Leaders sometimes assume people who produce well will always produce well, and don't think about their role in creating contexts for other kinds of talents to be successful. It is an easy fall back --- good worker = good worker and they aren't necessarily wrong on that, but it limits who else can participate
- Some leaders are really great at stretching people with one skill set to another. Others are not. If you are a leader and see that people don't think their talents are used well, it might be the "other" talents they have that you don't see as clearly OR talents they think they have but you might not.
- Nothing is better than an open, honest conversation about what you would like to be doing more of and why with your boss. Or, from the other perspective, nothing is better than open, honest conversation about what you would like to see more of and why with your employees. In both instances, it just might surprise you.
- Ask for volunteers for projects, being clear about what you are looking for. Volunteer for work outside your "zone", being clear about why you are putting yourself out there. Both bring about new skills, new perspectives, and possibly, stronger work product.