

CHAPTER 1

The Undertaker

One who daily does less than he can gradually becomes less than he is.

I won't devote much space to the undertaker performer. Frankly, who they are and what they do is as obvious as it is devastating. Here is a quick summary.

Undertakers Do Sub-Baseline Work

In the next chapter we will discuss the caretaker; and, while the caretaker at least does baseline work (not heroic by any means), the undertaker does not. Undertakers might be nice enough as people, but someone else continually has to carry their load, clean up their mess, or be frantically rushing around performing damage control in their wake. True to his or her classification, the undertaker undertakes and achieves nothing meaningful, and takes under or lowers morale, momentum, your brand, performance outcomes, cultural integrity, and your personal credibility. To exacerbate matters, the costs they inflict are not a one-time lump-sum payment. If only it were that simple! If only you could hold your nose one time, write a single check, and be done with the costs they inflict. But it is not that painless. For

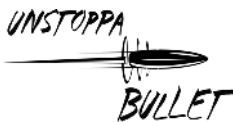
as long as you keep them, undertakers will create a torturous form of misery on the installment plan. The cost of keeping undertakers is staggering, and it can eventually put your organization on the endangered species list.



In essence, an undertaker is essentially unemployed, but still on your payroll. It is not the undertakers you remove from your organization that make you miserable; it's the ones you keep.

Toxic Achievers Are Undertakers

Despite a cliché to the contrary, the fact is that you *can* argue with success, if someone is getting it at the cost of violating your values. While the first characterization of undertakers addressed the below-average performer, a toxic achiever is one who may perform well—he or she could even be a top performer—but who also violates your values, can be selfish and divisive, and creates ongoing drama that debilitates culture. Weak leaders tolerate toxic achievers because they produce, but in the process they relegate themselves to heartless, selfish, sellouts. The damage that undertaker toxic achievers do to your culture, credibility, and brand is incalculable. Undoubtedly, well-known undertakers may have come to mind as you read these words—high-profile athletes or hired guns in business who sojourn from team to team performing well and meanwhile poisoning the locker room. But if identifying others who may fit either of these two descriptions was your primary focus, then you have missed the point. While there is a recommended resource in the Appendix of this book to help you identify and develop game changers in your organization, the four performance groups in this book are not first and foremost about anyone else when you consider them; they are about you.

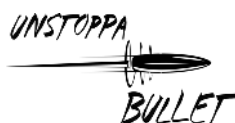


If you are lazy, selfish, or corrupt, you either won't use or will misuse your talent and make yourself completely expendable in the process.

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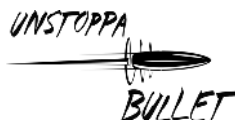
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How often do you demonstrate the traits in either of the prior two points? How often do you become divisive, bitter, selfish, or territorial; do less than you can; or create messes that others must clean up? To reiterate what I mentioned earlier, we are normally all a blend of the four mindsets from time to time. But, to become unstoppable, it is essential we develop the mindset and focus to think and act as a game changer more consistently, so that it dominates our work and personal life.



"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."—Leo Tolstoy (AZ Quotes 2017)

In my work consulting with retail clients like automotive dealers, I frequently observe sales representatives in both undertaker categories. On one hand there is "five-car Fred"—the underachiever—whom no one can count on to lift the team to a new level, and who predictably performs at substandard levels. But there's also "25-car Ted," who consistently leads the sales board, but thinks his high performance is a permission slip to live above the rules and values that the lesser performers are held accountable for. He comes in late, shortcuts processes, does not attend training, is not overly concerned about the rest of the team, and frequently conducts the "meeting after the meeting" at the watercooler to talk about how what was discussed by management is stupid, is irrelevant, or will never work.



If toxic achievers threaten to leave because they do not want to live your values, let them go. It's kind of like the trash taking itself out.

It's the Mindset

Incidentally, undertakers in both categories may be knowledgeable and highly skilled, possess impressive credentials, and be blessed with

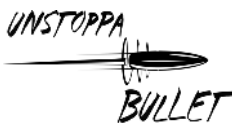
copious talent. But their mindset is seriously flawed, and all those aforementioned assets and advantages are never fully activated as a result. There are those who spend an inordinate amount of their personal and professional lives demonstrating undertaker characteristics who may be considered largely successful, but still miss their potential by miles.



No one individual can make another person an undertaker. Rather, undertakers cannot get out of their own way. They are products of their own poor decisions and excel in the art of self-destruction.

In summary, it is time to acknowledge where your self-destructive mindsets and actions have sabotaged your personal and professional life, and renounce those things immediately. You can change them. No one else but *you* can. It is not acceptable to do less than you are able. There is no way that is okay.

Nor is it tolerable to do great work but think you are above the values and behaviors that others must adhere to. In fact, that demonstrates an arrogance and selfishness that is disgusting. The great news is that you can change all of this—not by waiting for someone else to change or for something to change, but by changing your thinking. Life is short. Wake up. You cannot afford to spend one more minute living or working like an undertaker. You can and must do better.



There are three stages of accountability in organizations. Stage one is top-down, which is the most common and weakest. Stage two is peer-to-peer accountability, which is a step up and creates a stronger culture. Stage three is self-accountability, which is where game changers reside (“I do it because I said I would”). Undertakers make stage one their homestead.

Mission Unstoppable

To become an unstoppable game changer, you must master the following mindset and behavioral adjustments:

1. Don't even think about doing work that is less in quality or quantity than your absolute best. If you want to know how a game changer answers the question "How much is enough?," the answer is simple: "All I possibly can."

The good news for those aspiring to stand out in any organization is that it is not crowded at the top; it is crowded at the bottom. There is intense competition among the mediocre, where the undertakers and caretakers work and live. The recipe for standing out in a positive manner is both basic and brilliantly concise: Do all you can—the best you can—and do it every time.

David Williams, vice president of Horizon Forest Products, says:

Game changers are the best at what they do. They are the ones who are always at the top of the lists in regard to success in the company. They make up less than 10 percent of those in their position, not only in your company but in the industry.

They will simply outwork everyone else. They will be the ones that are in early and stay late. They do not work according to a clock or a time schedule. They will do whatever it takes to *win*, and they know that it does not happen in an eight-hour day. When you find these game changers, pay them well and do whatever you have to do to keep them on the team. They are successful people who will be a huge part of the success of the team. You absolutely need these people, so find a way to keep these people on your team. (David Williams, pers. comm.)

And Williams should know. He took over Horizon Forest Products, a wholesale flooring distributor, 19 years ago as it was

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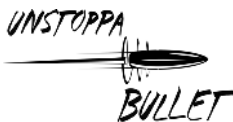
Unstoppable

ready to go out of business, and guided its turnaround. It is now one of the largest distributors in the industry, and one of the most profitable; and it didn't happen with a team that arrived at 8:59 and left at 5:01.

2. If you are a top performer, stay humble and know that you are not above values and rules, and that what is good for the team will not be subordinated to your personal pride, preferences, or comfort zone.

In other words, it is not all about you. So get over yourself (everyone else has), and expect to be measured by two metrics: performance and behavioral excellence—and know that excelling at the former does not excuse neglect of the latter.

3. As mentioned in the Introduction, it is important to remember that undertaker tendencies are not permanent verdicts for you or others; but to facilitate movement to more productive groups, a change in mindset will be required.
4. Use additional and helpful resources to help yourself and others create game changer performance. For daily quotes, tips, and strategies, follow us on Twitter: @DaveAnderson100 and @LearntoLead100.



Heads up to top performers—we love you, but you are not the center of the universe. That job has already been taken. You are not bigger than the team.
