

The reasons why people become incompetent at work

Have you ever wondered why the world is full of so many people who are incredibly incompetent at the very thing they are paid to do? If so, a **crotchety** educationalist called Laurence J Peter may have the answer.

crotchety 思想奇怪的；反复无常的

In Peter's view, most people were promoted based on their current performance, with no real consideration of their capacity to take on greater responsibility. Eventually, "every employee tends to rise to his [or her] level of incompetence", he wrote — a law he termed the "Peter Principle".

The strongest evidence for the theory comes from a recent study of 131 companies that all used the same performance management software. As you might expect, the team found that the best salesmen or women were the ones who tended to be promoted.

And the study finds that managers who used to be very high-performing sales workers tended not to bring a significant boost to their colleagues.

There are lots of potential reasons why this might occur. The personal drive — even aggression — that is needed to boost your own individual sales doesn't necessarily translate to the people skills necessary to motivate others, for instance.

In the meantime, knowledge of the Peter Principle might be useful for each of us personally.

If you frequently find yourself frustrated with your own boss or with your subordinates, it's worth considering the possibility that you've already reached your "level of incompetence".

That's not always easy to recognise — as Peter put it, "competence, like truth, beauty, and **contact lenses**, is in the eye of the **beholder**" — but a humble awareness may just encourage you to correct your flaws, or to find a new position where your unique talents are of greater value.

contact lense 隐形眼镜

beholder 旁观者