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BUILD A GREAT TEAM **Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills**

By John Tschohl

I am amazed when CEOs tell me they want to change the way they do business in hopes of increasing sales and profits and then they continue to use the same old practices that have left them stagnant in both areas. That includes hiring.

These CEOs will tell me they want to build a strong team of employees who are creative and think outside the box. Then they seek out people whose resumes are perfectly structured and that tout the same qualifications of the company's current employees who have not been able to move the business forward. Simply put, they hire people who fit in rather than people who aren't afraid to stand out.

Using the same standard hiring procedures you've always used is bound to get you more of what you already have: blasé results. If you want to build a great team, you must adjust your procedures to attract the boldest and the brightest in your industry.

The world economy is shifting, and that shift makes it critical that you leave the classic employee behind. That means eliminating employees who come to work every day, keep their heads down, follow orders, and avoid risks. You must seek out and hire people who are agile, creative, and multi-talented. Then you must empower them to use those skills drive your business.

To build a great team, you will need employees who can make quick, informed decisions to solve a problem, or to move a project forward. You will need employees who have great attitudes, who sincerely enjoy dealing with people.

My suggestion is this: Hire for attitude, then train for skills. Technical skills can be learned; good attitudes cannot. Vernon Hill, founder of Commerce Bank and co-founder of Metro Bank, London, said of his company's hiring practices: "The strategy is to hire outgoing people pleasers; then we train, train, and train."

Whether you're in banking, retail, or manufacturing that is a strategy well worth copying. Hire people-oriented employees. Hire people you can motivate. Hire people who are naturally endowed with positive service attitudes and values. How can you find those people? One of the best sources is your current workforce. Ask your best, most customer-driven employees if they can recommend others for the jobs you need to fill.

As you interview potential employees, stay away from questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Instead, ask open-ended questions: What are your strongest points—and your weakest points? What was your biggest failure, and what would you have done differently? What, specifically, do you think you can bring to this position? Describe a situation, and ask the candidate to explain how he or she would handle it.

Once you have hired and trained those creative, risk-taking, people-oriented employees, turn them loose. Empower them. Give them the authority to think outside the box and to make decisions that will bring in new customers and keep current customers coming back to you. Don’t micromanage them. In doing so, you will kill any efforts those employees might make to think creatively and to solve problems. Remember that, when you make people part of the decision-making process, they will be motivated to work harder for you.

If you want to build a strong team and grow your business, ask yourself this question: Do you want employees who merely fit in—or employees who aren’t afraid to stand out? The answer should be obvious.

John Tschohl, the internationally recognized service strategist, is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by USA Today, Time, and Entrepreneur as a customer service guru, he has written several books on customer service and has developed more than 26 customer-service training programs that have been distributed and presented throughout the world. John’s bimonthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge.