

# Hiring People Who Like People

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Any manager can serve customers better with outstanding people. And most organizations can bring much better people than they're hiring now by giving the hiring function the care it deserves. An Organizational Development expert said to focus upon two cardinal points and apply them to the hiring process:

- **Focus on Attitudes, Behaviors and Values**
- **Recognize just how difficult and vital the job of selecting people is. Invest enough time in the work, especially if you're a senior manager.**

## Focus on Attitudes

Nothing matters more than an employee's attitudes and behaviors. It's easy to fill a job with someone who has appropriate formal qualifications, such as college degrees and years of experience. But too often there "qualified" people don't truly serve your customers.

Zig Ziglar, the motivational speaker, often asks people to write down the characteristics of a good salesperson. They usually write such things as:

- honest
- diligent
- hardworking
- good with people
- ready to follow through
- loves customers
- high integrity
- knowledgeable about product.

Then Ziglar asks people to list how many of these characteristics are skills that can be taught or absorbed in years of experience, and how many are attitudes, which are much harder to teach. Most of the characteristics are attitudes.

Try the same exercise for any other position – say, a production worker, or a customer service representative, manager, research scientist – and you'll achieve remarkably similar results. Of course, you can't hire research scientists who lack graduate degrees in the sciences. But you'll pick winners if you remember that graduate degrees are just basic qualifications – the people with the right attitudes become the great producers.

## **Invest Enough Time**

The time that managers invest in hiring pays big dividends. This truth was certainly evident in the success of Nordstrom, the Seattle-based department store chain that achieved more than sixfold growth in the 1980's. Other retailers often accept mediocre people willing to tolerate mediocre wages, but Nordstrom applicants go through as many as three interviews before they're selected. To hire 400 people in one of their new stores in Virginia, they interviewed over 3,000 applicants.

Locally, a restaurant opened in Memphis called J. Alexanders. While there are literally hundreds of restaurants to choose from in the East Memphis area of town, there are lines of people waiting to get into this restaurant. Why? Because the servers are hired based upon outstanding attitudes and the desire to serve others! Customer service is second to none in this restaurant, which is the main reason there are lines of people waiting to be served.

## **The Hiring Secret 101 – Make a Profile and Stick to It!**

At the beginning of the hiring procedure, carefully create a profile of the position you're seeking to fill. Have a knowledgeable group of people complete surveys about the position looking for the soft skill and hard skills necessary for the position to be successful. This is the most overlooked part of the hiring process. Yet, research of high performing individuals within organizations has shown a high degree of relativity to the soft skills as indicators of ultimate levels of success. Therefore, begin the hiring process by identifying the soft skill competencies necessary for someone to become a long term success in a position.

Deliberately review the characteristics of people who have succeeded in your organization, and aggressively pursue them in applicants. Include the attitudes, skills and competencies the job itself requires and also the attitudes your organization's vision demands. Even a purchasing clerk or a shipping and receiving clerk should want to delight customers – both the organization's ultimate customers and the "internal customers" the individual serves.

Creating an excellent profile is hard work and may require guidance from outside sources. A study revealed, among other things, that candidates who will become outstanding salespeople exhibit two behaviors that are easy to spot in an interview. They show enthusiasm and they make eye contact.

Once a profile is created, stick to it. Ask questions and use skills assessments that reveal the applicant's past behavior in situations in which he or she should have shown the attitudes or competencies you're seeking. Ask manufacturing applicants:

When was the last time you saw somebody doing something dangerous? What did you do?

When you talk to references, ask if the candidates think about service to people and if they're team players. Ask all the other questions necessary to determine not just whether the candidate is a decent person, but whether he or she really matches your profile.

Also, when checking references be sure to go back three jobs. Most recent employers are concerned about the legal risk of an honest assessment or are eager to have the person they fired get a new job! In either case, the data you get on your candidate will be filtered and often misleading. The further back you go, the more honest former employers tend to be.

### **The Why of Position Analysis: The High Cost of Turnover**

Companies take better care of their people when they realize how much it costs to replace every person who leaves. With the low number of available talent in today's marketplace along with the declining numbers entering the workforce, the costs of turnover can only grow.

Here is a list of possible cost factors to be used in calculating the costs that organizations incur due to turnover:

1. loss of management time invested in training the departed employee;
2. pay given the former employee while he or she was learning the job;
3. cost of lost opportunities and customer dissatisfaction while the job is vacant;
4. recruiting cost and fees to find a replacement;
5. management time spent interviewing candidates for the vacated job;
6. cost of training the new employee;
7. salary paid to the new employee before he or she really knows the job;
8. cost of extra time the new person's supervisor must invest in him or her;
9. cost of mistakes the person makes when first on the job;
10. disruption suffered by the office during replacement;
11. loss of knowledge of the business that only the departed person possessed.

List the costs your organization or department suffers from turnover, and calculate the actual costs for each item. You'll be astonished at the results. Don't limit yourself to the above list, you can probably add half a dozen costs that pertain specifically to your organization. Few organizations claim that turnover isn't a problem, yet, few have quantified the costs.

Once they realize the cost of making poor hiring decisions or losing competent employees, maybe it's time to explore the use of outside resources to assist you in setting up a process and system for making the selection and retention of employees a higher priority. Once you make this decision the payback will be very high.



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