

You Win With The Best

Do You Have The “Business Athletes” You Need To Achieve Your Vision?

I am writing this because I believe there are still companies who dream about being the best and want people who can make them better. Those are the companies for which I wish to work. Like Diogenes with his lamp, my search thus far has been disappointing as many firms seem to have no sense of vision or have lost sight of – if they ever knew – what they can be. So, this commentary is more an attempt to clarify why I believe I can help a company rather than lamenting my personal search travails. To the contrary, I am hopeful that I will find the successful organization with the right philosophy or, perhaps, a company that has the right vision but still needs help to achieve it. Those are the companies I seek. Only you can tell me if you are one of them.

It seems that those of us who possess diverse and comprehensive experience, yet may be a bit older, are being overlooked in the marketplace. This is not based upon speculation or having read some recent articles. This is based upon personal, empirical evidence. Of course, there are a variety of euphemisms used that cover over the basic facts but from my experience the reference to “overqualified” takes on a far greater meaning when one is in the midst of the current job hunting landscape. There appear to be existing, though unspoken, viewpoints in hiring circles that older workers are resistant to learning, are not willing to work hard, are not technically savvy, or are short-term hires since they are nearing retirement.

In some instances, no doubt, there are individuals to whom these comments may apply. However, as global challenges threaten American competitiveness the need for educated and competent individuals with communication and interpersonal skills and the willingness to take on learning new technologies will escalate. While increased “productivity” – which in some instances translates into layoffs – is lauded from the towers of big business, the real challenge for America’s economic engine is finding the right people to sustain small to mid-size businesses which account for most of the employment in our economy. Likewise, it is the energetic and innovative smaller firms that sustain the economic engine. Therefore, hiring multi-skilled individuals who can serve many needs and have an impact on business performance without the need to expand payroll can be a critical decision – especially in these times. In other words, a motivated and multi-talented individual with comprehensive experience can make a larger impact with less expense. This literally allows the company to get more “bang” for its buck.

Certainly there are instances – such as specialized apprentice programs or openings for managerial trainees – where it makes sense to hire and develop younger workers who are expected to grow within their craft or within that particular company. However, since it is likely such younger individuals become restless and move on (less than five years statistically), institutional knowledge and consistency of performance may suffer. So, there is a role for creative, experienced, and stable performers to provide such consistency.

Of course, there is also a natural generational transition in society and in business, a changing of the guard from young to old that always occurs. There are many instances, however, where this change is a result of situations in the marketplace where certain companies see people as interchangeable, all equal, more cost factors than revenue generators. This narrow focus of business on short term goals, striving to meet bottom line and stock performance demands, thinking quarter-to-quarter, not long term has diminished loyalty. This prevailing attitude in many companies displays a lack of real understanding of what is necessary for business success and the creation of an environment to develop and sustain commitment.

I have been effective in leadership roles and sales assignments. And, I have worked for a few companies – especially my most recent permanent position – that did not understand the principles I describe a bit later below. Hence, these firms are continuously cycling through sales people and other personnel hoping for the right solution, the proverbial “magic bullet”, when the real problem is that they neither understand the business context they need to create nor the type of people they need to hire for success to occur.

Many businesses proclaim they seek change, new ideas, or want to move the business to a new plateau. The reality, however, is quite different. Most either fear or do not understand the dynamics for successful and sustainable change. In recent months, I have personally observed and spoken with businesses – several were losing customers, sales, and market share - that keep going through personnel, hiring and re-hiring for the same position. They hope things will be different but they keep hiring the same “safe”, industry-specific, supposedly qualified candidates that merely reflect their own myopic viewpoint. No wonder so many businesses struggle!

The fault, then – to paraphrase Shakespeare – is not necessarily in the workers but in the management. Mediocrity or lagging performance in business is not necessarily the result of worker incompetence, poor products, or the host of other reasons often heard. It is more likely a reflection of the management or, more specifically, the lack of dynamic and inspiring leadership. *A person hired for the wrong reasons, with the wrong perspective, put in the wrong place, and led by the wrong people will produce the wrong result.*

Einstein commented that “imagination is more important than knowledge”. Walt Disney, who was no slouch in the imagination department, stated, “You can dream, design, create, and build the most wonderful place in the world ...but it requires people to make the dream a reality.”

As a former teacher, please understand that I certainly do not dismiss the importance of knowledge. Quite to the contrary, I thrive on learning and my ability to learn has served me well over time. In fact, the vagaries of the marketplace (downsizings and business closures) have forced me to learn new things; to adapt; to be flexible; and to apply a wide range of knowledge and experience within diverse circumstances. What I am talking about is the willingness to not only seek new knowledge but to find ways to use it creatively. Companies seeking to grow and improve must learn that knowledge when

combined with creative, dynamic, and experienced leadership can create institutional imagination, thus unleashing the power of the entire organization.

Great companies are built upon two critical pillars – taking care of their employees and taking care of their customers. And, the first pillar must be solidly built or the second will never be completed. Companies that understand this and build upon these pillars become the envy of competitors.

Great companies understand that dynamic and imaginative leaders develop committed, empowered, focused, and team-oriented employees. These employees realize that caring for the customer is their primary duty and the primary function of the business. When this is orchestrated effectively and practiced consistently then everything else – better sales, consistency of service, increased profits, loyalty of clientele, and market prominence – will follow.

Insanity is often described as doing the same thing over and over again with the expectation of getting a different result. So, it is with many businesses when it comes to hiring sales and management personnel. Now, as your organization ponders the current challenges of the marketplace or considers recruiting and hiring needs, maybe it is time for you to dare to think and act differently.

Why not consider hiring a business and sales “athlete” who possesses diverse business knowledge; who understands customer-centric sales; who is multi-talented with a sense of creativity; who can build and motivate dedicated work teams; and, who is capable of enhancing your sales program and your image within the marketplace. Perhaps it is time to reconsider what you have always done and go with someone whose experience goes beyond your industry. Perhaps you need an organized, detail-oriented individual who understands how to relate to people; who can tap a vast store of situational experience that enables him to understand the diverse business concerns of prospects and customers; who knows how to uncover their needs and wants; and, who can lead and motivate people to help make your organization better.

If you think you like to know more about how I can help you, give me a call.

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