Build Leaders by Capitalizing on Their Strengths

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Are you attempting to "fix" some of your future leaders? The question is admittedly blunt. Use this article to examine your hiring and performance review systems.

I've observed organizations that seem to have no predetermined standards in their hiring systems. They put an ad out there and interview any candidates who express interest. They offer a job to the best person among those who apply. After just a few months on the job, the deficiencies become obvious. Performance review time rolls around, and the individual is asked to change.

Everyone hates performance reviews. They tend to focus on the team member's poorer performance areas. The boss dislikes pointing out deficiencies. The individual is discouraged from having those behavioral inadequacies highlighted. Both the boss and the individual fear that the probability of significant improvement is low.

Working on the weak areas isn't very inspiring and progress, if it occurs at all, comes slowly. With begrudging efforts, the behavior moves from intolerable to barely adequate.

Would you like to reduce the pain and hassles for everyone?

Let's start by redefining your hiring process. Figure out what characteristics your current best performers exhibit. If you don't have any "best performers," imagine what would be typical if you had them. Then design your advertising to attract the type of candidate who can meet those qualifications. Make your expectations demanding, and most of those who would turn out to be poor contributors won't even apply.

Design interview questions that allow people with your preferred characteristics to express their past successful demonstration of those attributes. Ask follow-up questions that penetrate to understand the candidate's unique contributions and the specific results he or she achieved.

Before you conduct the first round of interviews, generate a rating scale against which you will evaluate each candidate's response. Use a 1 to 5 rating scale where "1" is a poor response, "5" is outstanding, and "3" describes the kind of information that is minimally acceptable to you.

From the best applicants, select the individual who has the attributes that will uniquely contribute to both the current need as well as future growth opportunities the individual might fill. During the initial months of employment, look for strengths the individual naturally offers. In coaching sessions, look collaboratively with the individual for new opportunities to apply those strengths within his or her operational responsibility.

When a weakness surfaces, beware of the cultural belief that every contributor should be well-rounded. The truth is that successful teams are filled with people who perform exceptionally well at some things, but not all things. Challenge your thinking if it drives you to conclude that this is a debilitating limitation that needs to be fixed.

Instead, creatively consider with the individual how he or she might work around the observed weakness. Maybe the individual can expand a strength area to compensate. Perhaps someone else who loves those particular activities could assume them.

Once you start looking for options other than "fixing" folks on your team, you'll free your contributors to emphasize the areas where they are naturally strong. Building on the strengths of each individual will be a surprising boost to the overall effectiveness of your organization.

You'll find that each individual will step forward and volunteer his or her strengths whenever the organization has a need. You'll have a more well-rounded team than you'd ever anticipated!

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