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## All We Need Are a Few Good People

*Bill McCurry*



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“Good people are sooo hard to find—and it’s getting harder.” Decades ago some business guru said, “Management’s biggest responsibility is to attract and hire the right people who will do the right thing for the right reason. Management’s primary responsibility is recruiting, not managing.”

As unemployment falls and wages rise, recruiting takes on a new significance. The temptation to grab the first warm body increases as we become almost desperate to fill a slot. Resist that desperation! It’s better to have fewer open hours than to have a toxic salesperson infecting your customers.

I know that’s harsh, but consider what you’ve invested in marketing costs to attract just one new customer into your store. How easily can that customer relationship be poisoned, instantly and permanently, by an improperly hired

employee with a bad attitude?

Our world is full of inconsistencies. Many owners/managers forbid rank-and-file employees to post publicly under the company’s social medial umbrella, an area where—if management desires—the post can be pre-approved or certainly reviewed the instant it’s public. However, management neither sees nor reviews innumerable contacts employees make with the public every day. Remember that marginal employee you hired? What are they saying to a customer right now that might cause her to leave permanently?

If you’re constantly recruiting for the right people, you have a continual flow of prospective employees. While there’s no clear, universal definition of a toxic employee, generally they are “communicable and cancerous” workers who are dangerous to themselves and those around them. Evaluate your current and potential team. Always look to improve every aspect of your operations, including personnel.

Here’s an interesting exercise in personnel management. Assume last month you attended The Marshall Tucker Band Party at the IGC show. In the middle of the event you receive a voicemail from the store telling you someone quit, but you can’t hear the departing person’s name. In that instant, who do you wish had left? Likely your gut told you immediately who would be the best team member to lose. Now, what are you going to do with that information?

A single employee's bad attitude infects an organization faster than everyone else's good attitudes. One of my mentors owned a restaurant. If a server came in frowning, he made them clock out and "go get that smile you had when you were hired." He knew the servers' attitudes influenced how much the patrons enjoyed their food. Reputations are built one interaction at a time.

If you've identified someone on your team with a toxic attitude/personality, what did you do to help them improve their attitude? It's your responsibility to keep every employee improving or (if necessary) moving out.

Utrecht University has done many studies on employee productivity. One study inserted a toxic person into a functioning production line. No verbal communication was allowed between that person and the other workers on the assembly line. When the negative person joined the already functioning group, the quality acceptance average decreased and worker injuries increased. How's that for contagious attitudes?

Sometimes showing a little attention can bring amazing results. In "The Hawthorne Effect," Elton Mayo expanded on Fredrick Taylor's Scientific Management theories. He discovered that raising/dimming the lights increased productivity because the workers were involved in impacting their workplace. Other assembly line tests showed if workers could press a "stop button" when the line moved too fast, they rarely did. When feeling in control of the process, workers strived to meet their quotas.

Commit to your team, your customers and your company that you'll insist on supportive, positive attitudes that lift co-workers and customers alike. No one enjoys being in a negative atmosphere. Negativity is contagious. Don't let it breed in your organization. **GP**

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*Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at [wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com](mailto:wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com) or (609) 688-1169.*