

STRATEGIES

Fall 2003

SHOP TALK

The Right People From The President's Desk

Suzanne M. Miklos, Ph.D.

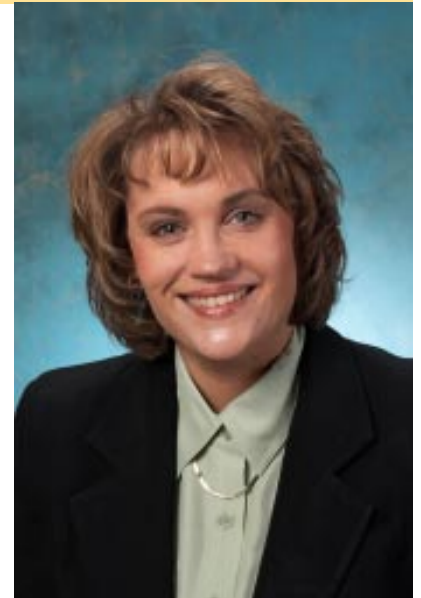
Bringing new people into our organizations is one of the most important jobs leaders have. Several popular books, including Jim Collins' "From Good to Great," recommend getting the right people on the board before fully defining strategy. Bossidy makes a similar point in "Execution." If the people aren't right, then nothing else will work to enable the organization to achieve its goals. While it sounds simple, it is not easy. This seems to be the case regardless of the size of the organization.

Several of my small business clients need to have the right people to move their business to the next level of size or competence. Mistakes can be deadly to revenue, with the added dilemma that interpersonal fit with existing staff is as critical as technical and customer service skills.

In larger businesses, the issues can be related to hiring practices and the linkage to other people systems, including performance management and employee development. Often these systems were once strong or fit the size and strategy of the business. Companies outgrow their people systems just as they outgrow technology solutions. Hiring and assessment processes to evaluate the fit of people are no exception to the rule. Companies realize that hiring and assessment practices need to evolve as well.

Business leaders are often in the best position to recognize people issues so constant dialogue between HR and its business customers is the first line of defense. Additionally, HR can help the business articulate and differentiate between needs and wants in terms of competencies and fit. Early in my career I conducted several individual assessments for the same manager of a technology group only to have the manager fire each person we identified as meeting the competency requirements. The dilemma was solved when we realized the competency we weren't examining for had something to do with "ability to work for a brilliant and eccentric manager." Once that trait was identified as essential, the right person was identified. Over the years, I have found the nuances to be powerful in determining successful fits.

In finding right people for the company, leaders can identify the most critical competencies required and also the less technical but critical "fit" issues. Reflecting on why some key players have left a company and some have stayed and flourished can yield clues. Identifying core corporate cultural values such as curiosity, developing others, and innovation can help separate enduring criteria from others that change with business cycles. As your organization begins its planning for 2004, don't forget to consider the impact of strategy on hiring.





Internet Testing

The New Technology

Rebecca Toney, Ph.D.

Recently, while shopping for a relative's birthday, I toyed with the idea of purchasing a high-technology gift for him – a digital camera. However, as I further explored this gift option at the store, I found myself asking a critical question: *What else do I need to buy for this camera to work properly?* Add-on memory cards and rechargeable batteries were important considerations with some models, thereby making inexpensive cameras much less of a bargain.

Incorporating new technology into your HR systems should be met with similar critical questions. Knowing “what else” you need to think about to make the new approach work is essential. For example, the Internet is a relatively new technology in terms of its use in the hiring process for most companies. Testing that once took place onsite, administered by HR professionals, can now be taken on-line, self-administered by job candidates. The benefits are clear and well-advertised – reduced staff time and costs associated with the coordination and administration of candidate testing.

However, research that is underway points out potential drawbacks with unproctored testing via the Internet. For example, tests of general mental ability may be susceptible to cheating, particularly if they are not timed. Be sure that you understand how the on-line assessment is timed and scored. While onsite testing provides a standard (presumably distraction-free) environment for all candidates, when self-administered from a remote location, control over the environment is lost. Different candidates may experience different levels of distraction during testing, which could impact scores. Consider whether the likelihood of a distracted environment may be related to race, age, or gender. Studies of Internet usage patterns suggest there are differences in ease of access, frequency of use, and comfort levels in using the Internet. Be sure that the

new technology is not going to put a protected group at a disadvantage in the hiring process – this could result in adverse impact.

This is not to say that technology is necessarily problematic in its application to HR processes. It can indeed provide time- and cost-saving options, as well as attract top quality candidates. However, caution and careful consideration of your organization's situation is imperative. Ask questions to determine if the high-tech solution meets your needs and your users' needs.

When making your decision, proceed with both curiosity and caution, identifying all of the options that may meet your users' needs. This past year we offered an on-line response option for a client distributing paper surveys to their customers. As it turned out, less than 10 of the 500 responses came in over the Internet! It seemed that the low-tech option of returning the survey in a self-addressed, stamped enveloped was preferable to the users. At the other end of the spectrum, another company successfully had 100% of its respondents use the Internet.

Oh, and if you're wondering about that digital camera...as I reflected on my relative's lack of interest and skill with high-tech gadgets, I opted instead to go with gift certificates to a nice restaurant!

Focus on Employees

Employee Orientation that Works

Marie D. Francosky, Ph.D.

The first six months of a new employee's tenure with your company can determine the quality of the contribution to your company's success. By providing the employee an orientation to how your organization operates, you can have a strong, positive impact during this important period of time.

Orientation to a new job happens whether or not you have an official program. It can be anything from "wash your own coffee cup" to an extended training and acclimation period that covers all aspects of employment, the company, and the job. When employment starts with clear expectation for both parties, the employee is more likely to feel the employer is fair and more likely to live up to these expectations. The orientation process lays the groundwork for on-going communication and professionalism in the working relationship.

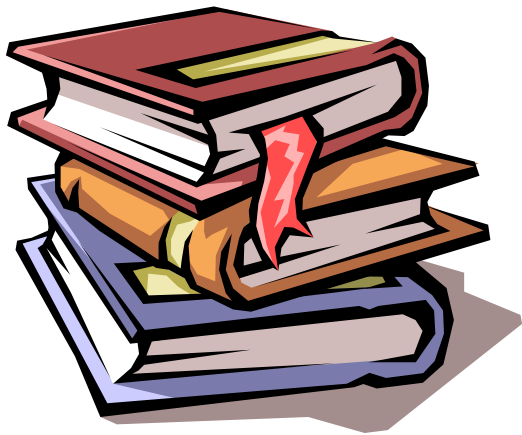
Benefits of an Effective Employee Orientation

- Employees will "get up to speed faster" since they will not have to struggle to find out about basic operations/logistics on their own.
- Anxiety, caused by new situations, will be reduced. Employees who are relaxed make fewer mistakes.
- Commitment and company loyalty is related to attending employee orientation.
- New employees feel valued and "fit in" to the new job more easily and quickly, improving their likelihood of staying with your company.
- Regular points of contact through such events as on-going orientation sessions provide a chance for employees to give and receive feedback regarding work activities and performance. This enables the employee to work together with people in the company to ensure that his or her work is on track.

Keys to an Effective Employee Orientation

- Involve department heads and co-workers - to facilitate introductions to the new employee and make social and work connections.
- Distribute a "guide book" - benefits, policies, company history, important contacts, phone numbers.
- Include a "survival" package - map of office and surrounding area, lists of acronyms, products, and key clients.
- Give the new hire some responsibility for his/her own orientation (e.g., self-directed learning).
- Seek feedback from employees to ensure the organization is meeting needs and expectations.

Book Reviews



Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan

Crown Publishing Group; ISBN 0609610570

Execution is referred to as “the missing link between aspirations and results,” thus, making it happen is paramount for business leaders. The authors indicate that the biggest hindrance to success is the absence of execution, although failure is often attributed to other causes in the modern business environment. They explain that execution (linking a company’s people, strategy, and operations) is what will determine success in today’s business world. One of the most important lessons we took from this book was that of assessing the organization’s capacity to execute its strategies. Particularly for mid-size businesses, strategies are often set with an unrealistic look at resources and capacity, resulting in failed strategic plans. Identifying leaders with the right behaviors, a culture that rewards execution, and a reliable system for having the right people in the right jobs are the fundamentals.



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