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Written by: Bryan K. Williams

Hiring & Engaging a World-Class Team

When I was hired over a decade ago to join a hotel, the general manager told me that if in 6-months the team was not better as a result of me being hired, then I've failed. Wow, what pressure! He explained that, just like on a sports team, the primary purpose of bringing in new players is not to take up space on the roster, but rather to help the team win more games. At that moment, I realized that he was not just looking for another "warm body". I could tell that this would be a different place to work. This would be a place that valued my contributions as a person, and one that let me know that my work ethic and dedication would DIRECTLY influence the success of the team. If you're wondering what the job was...it was as a busboy in the hotel's restaurant.

Surely, such high expectations are usually reserved for managers and senior leaders. Why would the general manager place such high expectations on an employee who cleans tables and brings bread to the table? Simply put, the general manager's vision was to have a world-class team, and world-class teams have world-class employees...in every role. Even if I was mopping the floor, I had to be world-class.

The focus of this article is on the on-boarding experience for new employees. The on-boarding experience includes the recruitment phase, hiring phase, orientation phase, and department training phase. Each phase should reflect your team's commitment to excellence and affirm the important role that the employee will play in achieving the team's goals. The best way to get a team of world-class employees is to set the expectation very high from the onset. So what should be done in each phase?

Recruitment Phase

- Include your company's motto, mission statement, and purpose statement on every advertisement. Include them on your application as well.
- While the application is being filled out:
 - Show a video of what you stand for
 - Show a video of employee testimonials
 - Show a message from the President or another senior leader
- From the beginning of the recruitment phase, applicants should feel like this is not *just another job*. This is a special place to work. A place where everyone is expected to be a service professional and perform with excellence everyday. They should also feel like they will be treated with excellence by the company.

Hiring Phase

- During the first face-to-face interview, ask “Why do you want to work **here**?” Anything resembling, “I’m looking for a job” should be a red-flag. I suspect that you want employees who believe in your company and yearn to be part of a winning team.
- Ask about the applicant’s experience delivering great service. Listen for specific examples...not hypotheticals or what-ifs. Remember, you are looking for people that naturally enjoy service. If they naturally enjoy serving others, then they should have recent examples.
- In addition to the standard Human Resource questions, ask other questions that align with your mission and values. For example, if “taking ownership” is an important team value, ask about specific times when they took ownership of a situation. The point is to hire professionals whose personal values mirror your team’s values. If the match is right, you have a recipe for a successful, long-term relationship.
- Your ideal prospects should feel like your team is the place they have been looking for their entire careers or the place where they would like to establish their careers.
- Assemble a panel of your best employees conduct peer-interviews. This is a great way to keep your best staff engaged! If you want great employees, then involve your existing great employees in the hiring process.

Orientation Phase

- Orientation is meant to be a significant, emotional experience.
- This is your opportunity to treat your new employees the way you would like them to treat their customers.
- If the orientation is robotic, procedural, or lacks emotion, then that is how the majority of your team will serve their customers.
- Ensure all signage is clear leading to the orientation room. Everyone should know who the new employees are. Wouldn’t it be great if the employees involved in the interview process were at orientation to greet the new employee?
- Ensure every new employee has an attractive name tent and professional handout materials. This is to show that you are prepared for the new employees.
- Select a panel of current employees to give testimonials and to answer questions. This can be a very memorable part of the orientation.
- Senior leaders should be involved to communicate the culture of the company.

Department Training Phase

- The transition from new employee orientation to the department orientation should be seamless.
- A representative/mentor/trainer from the new employee’s department should be present at the end of orientation to greet the new employee.

- The new employee can be presented with a packet that includes a welcome letter from the team, work schedule, training schedule, and department specific information.
- Establish a cross-training schedule for your new employees that include time to spend in other primary departments. This will help build empathy and interdependence between departments.
- Bring the employees back at least 1-month later for an orientation reunion. This is to see how the new employees are doing and to solicit their feedback on ways to improve the team.

With an effective on-boarding experience, your new employees will be excited that they've finally found a company that cherishes excellence. Your commitment to hiring the best will also re-engage your existing employees. They will be happy with your commitment to only hire and orient the best applicants. Whether you are hiring a busboy or a general manager, set your expectations high and excellence is sure to follow.

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