

How to Hire a Winning Team

by Peter Lowe

(Reprinted by permission from *Peter Lowe's SUCCESS '98* magazine)

As a kid on the playground it was easy to choose the right people for a winning team. First of all, you knew the kids. You knew their strengths and their weaknesses. You knew Tommy could hit a ball out of the park but he was a lousy pitcher. Sam could run like the wind but couldn't catch a ball to save his life. And if you didn't know all the kids you had to choose from, you could at least size up their abilities by looking at them: pick the junior hulk first; give the wimpy kid with the horn rims to the other team. As an adult in the business world, picking a winning team is more complicated.

I feel extremely fortunate to have a terrific, talented team supporting me. There are so many gifted individuals whom we have the privilege of working with at Peter Lowe International... from our super competent management team to the enthusiastic people in our Customer Service Center, to the outgoing, hardworking team that coordinates everything at our seminars.

In 1987 I hired my first employee. I hired a super talented individual who was as versatile and entrepreneurial as I was. She helped me to grow our organization into the multi-million dollar organization that it is today. I'm delighted to be able to tell you that she is still with me. She is the Senior Vice President of Peter Lowe International and my beautiful wife, Tamara!

As our organization began to grow and our seminars became bigger, we had to hire more people to help us. I learned first-hand that a good first impression does not necessarily make for a good employee. I learned that performance counts more than packaging. The young man I thought was filled with dynamic potential before I hired him, turned out to be a clock-watching, slow-moving lounge after I hired him. The seasoned executive that I thought would add insight and experience, turned out to be too moderate and sedate for the fast-paced, risk-taking seminar field.

After much trial and error, research and testing, I developed a unique system to hire a winning team that has worked extremely well for my company.

HIRE EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN POTENTIAL

The best indication you have of how someone will behave or perform in the future is how they behaved or performed in the past. Don't hire who they "could be" with a little training or mentoring. Hire who they are now. Then you don't have to spend the time, effort and money to develop them to do the job. Someone else has done that for you. They've made their mistakes elsewhere. They come into the position with the ability to do the job because they've done the same or similar thing before.

MATCH THE PERSON TO THE POSITION, RATHER THAN ATTEMPTING TO TAILOR THE POSITION TO SUIT THE PERSON

One of the most common hiring mistakes takes place when you interview a bright, talented individual whom you like, and even though they aren't quite right for the position, you hire them anyway. It's an understandable mistake. You think, "This isn't the best position for this person, but I like him/her and I don't want to lose a good candidate." Remember this: a good candidate in the wrong position is a bad employee.

Make a list of the attributes, skills, abilities, and personality traits that would be found in the ideal person for the position you are hiring for. Then hire the person who best matches that criteria.

ENTICE GOOD CANDIDATES WITH A GOOD WAGE



When I place an ad for a position in my company, I publish the salary. I believe in paying a fair market wage for entry level positions and a good wage for key positions. I would much rather pay a prodigy handsomely, than pay an average wage for an average employee.

ELIMINATE UNSUITABLE CANDIDATES

Once the resumes start rolling in, I have a secretary take a brief look at them. If they are illegible, poorly photocopied, written in crayon or contain spelling errors, they are immediately disqualified. Next, I have packages sent out to every applicant and ask them to complete and return the enclosed paperwork. The packages I send out contain a self-scoring personality profile and a list of 25 questions that I ask the applicants to answer in writing.

So what are some of the specific questions I ask? It depends on the position, but here are some of the questions I have used in the past....

- **If you miss an overnight express courier's pick-up deadline for a package that must go out today, what do you do?**

If the response is, "mail it out the first thing tomorrow morning," I am not going to want to hire that person. If they say they would call every courier in town to get that package out on time; if they would drive to the airport to put the package on the plane themselves; if they would drive two hours from Tampa to Orlando to make the deadline there... then I'm interested.

Some other questions I've used on my questionnaires include...

- **How many tasks do you like to handle simultaneously?**
- **On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your math ability?**
- **How do you organize yourself for maximum productivity?**
- **What is a typical day like in your current position?**
- **Do you prefer to work quickly with some errors or slowly with no errors?**

For every 100 packages I send out, 30 to 50 are returned. Do I lose a lot of talented candidates that way? I,m sure I lose some, but more importantly, I've weeded out the people who were too apathetic to respond. Those are the people I don't want to interview anyway.

SCORE THE APPLICANTS

I score the returned packages from 1 to 10. I then personally interview my top candidates. At the conclusion of each interview I spend five to ten minutes evaluating the candidate with a check mark or an "X" next to each attribute that my dream employee would have for this position. For example, here is how a typical form might look for an executive secretary applicant:

- **Cheerful**
- **Fast paced**
- **75 wpm**
- **Can travel, work overtime and weekends**
- **Transcription experience**
- **Good phone skills**
- **Composition Skills**
- **Can work unsupervised**

By the time this process is completed, the best candidate is obvious. I trust that this systematic approach to picking a winning team will be as advantageous and profitable for you as it has been for our organization.