

HIRE DOGS THAT WANT TO PULL THE SLED

Imagine that your business is a dogsled – you're in a race against your competitors, and you're counting on your dog team to pull you across the finish in first place.

The sled is your business, the dogs are your employees (I know, it's an unfortunate metaphor!), and the other teams are your competitors. To pull ahead, it will be critical to assemble a team that can work well together, and that will be committed to winning.

Elite racers know that winning starts with building a team that will pull the sled with all the enthusiastic gusto of a big, lovable hound dog. Of course, not every dog will like to pull, and not every employee will excel at the level of customer service that wins the race in today's business environment. What you need is to learn from the "mushers" who know how to "hire" the best dog teams for relentless performance.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING YOUR TEAM

Customer-service professionals aren't born, they're made. So it's essential to start by looking for certain core attitudes they were born with. You need to identify and hire people who have the right set of personal attitudes, and then help them acquire the skills to provide exceptional customer service relentlessly. The prospects you should be looking for will have an instinct for talking to people and treating them well, with respect and concern – the foundational elements of great customer service.

Positive energy and a great attitude will go a long way toward building a service culture within your business. Look for positivity, mental agility, sincerity and creativity. Once they feel empowered, those will be the people who'll be relentless in giving your customers excellent service.

It's critical to hire people who will want to drive your business, who will share your goals, and who'll be committed to driving your business. As mentioned previously, not every dog will want to pull the sled, and not every employee will want to do whatever it takes to ensure that your company succeeds.

You can train people in the right skills to do the job, but you can't train them to have a great attitude – they'll either have it, or they won't. If your employees don't have a great attitude, they won't be focused on giving the customers the kind of service that will

increase their loyalty to your business and drive your sales. A great attitude includes treating people – coworkers and customers alike – with respect and concern. It means being enthusiastic and sincere.

A great example of a company that has highly skilled employees who have great attitudes is Apple. Apple's employees offer valuable expertise while exuding warmth and concern for the customer and for the problems they might be having. I'm guessing it's harder to get a job with Apple than it is to get into Harvard.

IDENTIFYING EMPLOYEES WITH THE RIGHT POTENTIAL

Another key question is: How can you identify the potential employees who'll have the positive attitudes you need? The first step is to have several people conduct interviews with the applicant, to give you a range of different perspectives. Get input from people who've had contact with the applicants – including your receptionist. What did she/he observe about the applicant as they waited to meet you? How did they treat the receptionist? During the interview, ask open-ended questions rather than questions that call for a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Most applicants will tell you what they think you want to hear. If you ask them if they're hard workers, every one of them will tell you that they are. To be sure, ask them for examples – probe for deeper insights.

Ask for examples of how they've solved customers' problems in the past. Are they empowered? Are they willing to bend or break the rules to give the customer the best service possible?

Listen to what the applicants tell you, and watch them as they respond. Body language can often tell you more about their real attitudes than their words. Does the applicant convey warmth, enthusiasm and energy? If you were a customer, would you trust this person to treat you well and solve your problem? **RO**

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