

ATTITUDE OVER APTITUDE

As a business owner or executive, what's the most important thing you look for when hiring an employee? Is it a resume that is replete with degrees and an impressive list of previous jobs or positions?

All too often, those are what employers are looking for, but I suggest it should be something different. Sure – you want employees who are intelligent, but there's something more you should be looking for. In a nutshell, you should look for “attitude over aptitude.” Why? Because you can train people on the skills they'll need if they want to work for you, but it's almost impossible to change people's attitudes.

True service leaders will recognize the truth of that statement. Vernon Hill, former CEO of Commerce Bank, Metro Bank London, and Republic Bank, summed it up like this: “If you don't smile during the first interview, there won't be a second interview.”

You'd do well to put that principle in place at your company. Customer-contact employees must possess and practice a positive attitude that will make customers feel welcomed and that will magnetize them to want to continue to do business with you. These positive qualities are equally important when it comes to building a team of employees who'll work well together and drive your business to greater heights.

Most of us have worked with employees who should never be allowed to have personal contact with the customers because they lack the ability to be engaging and helpful. While they might be unusually intelligent, they don't have what it takes to form connections with other people. Often described as nerds, they'd rather spend eight hours a day punching numbers or staring at a screen than interacting with other humans.

Of course, you must have products and services of exceptional quality, at great prices, but when you combine great products with great employee attitudes, the customers will come knocking. Those three things, combined, are crucial to your success.

Consider the customer service leaders in your industry, and follow their lead when hiring new employees. Southwest Airlines, with more than 66,000 employees, hires only one of every 45 applicants – Southwest is focused as much on personal qualities of common sense and humor as the skills the employees need to do the job – a hiring policy that ensures travelers will have a safe trip that includes exceptional service.

Southwest hires people to deliver unparalleled hospitality, and as a direct result it has earned passionate loyalty among the 130 million customers it serves every year.

WHEN HIRING EMPLOYEES, I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU LOOK FOR THESE ATTRIBUTES:

- **Smiles** – A smile goes a long way in sending the message that you care and that you're grateful for the business your customers bring to you. A smile is a visual warm welcome.
- **Friendliness** – When a smile is linked to a genuinely helpful attitude, plus using the other person's name, it makes them feel important. It also builds trust and opens the customers to receive the advice you give them about your products and services, and to spending their money with you.
- **Communication Skills** – Look for employees who communicate well with you during the interview. Their body language can tell you a lot, so pay attention – are they making eye contact as you talk, or are they hugging their arms and staring at the ground, sending a message that they'd rather be anywhere else? Eye contact is critical to good communication.
- **Personality** – Some people naturally connect with others – they're the people who smile as they walk through the door, happily greeting coworkers and customers and putting smiles on their faces, too.
- **Enthusiasm** – People who're excited about their lives, their work, and their relationships emanate an energy that is difficult to describe, but you'll recognize it when you see it.

Please visit www.customer-service.com for more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute. **RO**

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