

Employing people you like

A Guest Article by Christopher Jenkins
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The owner-manager's privilege

Our great privilege, as owner-managers, is that we are also the architects of our social environment at work. We can say "no" at interview to people if we don't like them, and we can therefore choose the people with whom we work. It seems that not many of us recognise this, if only because the criterion of whether you actually like someone never seems to figure higher up the list than factors such as relevant experience or the right image.

Surely, then, we should only employ people we like? Isn't that rather sensible? The argument goes that the other criteria are non-essential. Does it really matter if they do not have the experience? If they are intelligent, they will learn what they don't know quickly enough.

Good training programmes will give you employees with the right credentials, but nothing can turn your new recruits into people with whom you get on. There is little that can be done to change a destructive ego that you suddenly discover is wreaking havoc in your midst.

Different approach

Someone without the experience, who probably also comes from a different background, will approach things in a different way. They will bring skills from another arena to the one in which you work.

As an accounting firm, we purposely seek out arts graduates rather than people with a so called "relevant" degree in higher maths or accounting. Why? Not just because I have a degree in Fine Art, but also because the clients, with whom we must bond to form those valued relationships, are probably going to want to chat over a beer about something other than accounting!

Is diversity the key?

So we surround ourselves with like-minded souls, but of course the key question is whether or not a team of people who are all alike can function effectively as a business unit. Or is it the case that the dream team requires a diversity that is only born of opposites?

For Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, the essential step in creating a truly great business involves getting "the right people on the bus". The right people will all believe in what their "level 5 leader" has to say about life and will all have the same "hedgehog" attitude to building a business.

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But wait a minute! Is it actually the case that the people you like are like you? Not if you are still the sort of person who seeks out or tries to buy in what it is you haven't got. This is usually the cause of most failed first marriages: the proof lies in the evidence that most people, second time around, realise that you are best off with someone like yourself, made in your own image, a soul mate.

Secret ingredient

So what *is* the essential ingredient in the dream team? What makes people exude that enthusiasm at work that is so infectious, makes light of every problem, and makes over-achievement the norm? What creates the loyalty that makes people stay at their job so that you can build up the team over the longer term? We all know that it is not the money.

The secret is a sense of belonging. And for that to exist, there must be homogeneity in the team. Make sure that the personal agenda of everyone who works for you is the same as your corporate agenda. Make sure that what is good for the company is good for everyone, and make sure that your company's agenda fits those who work in it.

Then it becomes impossible for one member of the team to profit purposely through the misfortune of another. Then it becomes likely that your people will want to teach each other everything they know, rather than guarding their knowledge for their own benefit; where if one of you has a problem on the left, everyone on the right will rush across to help.

It is the creation of that virtuous circle that is such a powerful dynamic in creating and maintaining exceptional performance.

But how are you going to do that if you don't like everyone who works for you?

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If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact **TCii** on **020 7099 2621**.