

When the Student is Ready (Part IV)

How are your management and leadership skills? What have you done to prepare yourself to lead highly talented people?

Many business owners are great technicians. They know the technical end of their businesses inside and out. And that's a good thing, especially if they're the ones who will have to train their service technicians. But technical competence alone is not enough if you plan to recruit and keep really good people.

Too often small business owners tend to wax eloquent with candidates during the employment interview about how their companies are going to be the next Microsoft. They tell their candidates how they can become rich and famous if they get in on the ground floor with their company. At the same time the candidates can sniff out a mile away what the real story is, and they do it on a purely subconscious level.

The best people in any position are attracted to business owners who are also good leaders. They care more about how they think you'll be able to manage and lead them than about how well you clean. They want to know how skillfully you can grow your business and provide meaningful futures for them and their families. Although poor management skills won't cost you your job, it will cost you the confidence of your staff.

Are you working as hard at developing your management skills as you are at your technical skills? Enhanced technical skills will show you how to perform your current job better, but enhanced management skills will show you how to get your people to perform better and help you move beyond doing everything yourself.

How can you know what you don't know? Since most of us are pretty good at the jobs we do, we have a good idea of the kind of person we're looking for to replace us as our company grows. But what happens when we need to hire someone for a position we've never performed... bookkeepers, salespeople, administrative people, operations managers, project managers? The list goes on.

It's hard to identify the employee characteristics we should be looking for in other positions. Yet as the owner of your company it's critical that you have a general understanding of the functions performed in those jobs—and the kind of people who perform them—if you're going to successfully hire talented people to fill them.

At the risk of sounding like I'm shamelessly promoting one of the programs I do on hiring and managing, I need to point out that maybe it's time you get to a class offered by someone who deals with hiring top performers.

At the end of the day your company will only perform at the level your people perform. And your people are a reflection of how you view yourself. So, look around your company, do an inventory of the talents of the people you have on staff, and if you like what you see, congratulations. Keep up the good work. But, if you don't like what you see, then maybe it's time to get to work on yourself.

As you become more prepared to accept good people in your company, I'm confident more good people will appear ready to work for you.