

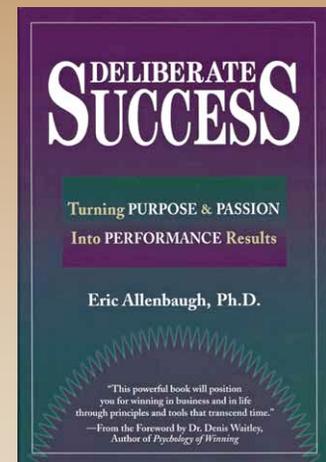
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# THE 3 “A’S” OF HIRING WINNERS: *Attitude, Aptitude & Alignment*<sup>®</sup>

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Achieving “Deliberate Success” starts with hiring the right person, and no substitute works nearly as well. An executive I interviewed at Nordstrom reported: *“We are more interested in how candidates fit into the Nordstrom culture and their commitment to customer service than we are in what is on their resume.”* A Maytag executive made a similar comment to me. Southwest Airlines *“hires for attitude and trains for skill.”* The late Steve Jobs, Co-founder of Apple Computer, reported: *“We hire really great people and create an environment where people can make mistakes and grow.”* Success-oriented organizations hire well, then seek to develop these talented people to their full potential.

***“We need to be a connoisseur of talent.”***

Tom Peters

When hiring, consider three non-negotiable criteria to assure long-term success:

1. Attitude (Spirit)
2. Aptitude (Talent)
3. Alignment (Vision & Values)

Don’t be seduced into hiring even a highly skilled applicant whose poor attitude or lack of cultural alignment raises yellow flags. In the long-run, your business and your customers will be far better off by hiring an individual having both a positive attitude and an aptitude to do the job, even though their skills might not fully match what you are initially seeking. Given the right aptitude, skills can be taught through a systematic developmental process. You say you can’t afford to take the time to train someone for the job? Consider the time and expense involved in hiring the wrong person for the job. Under those circumstances, you will deal with the costly consequences of that hiring error.



Hiring people with the “right attitude” strategically positions the organization for a profitable and productive future. The “right attitude” is a function of work ethic, customer service, teamwork, quality, safety, personal accountability, adaptability, and stewardship of company resources. This long-term commitment to hiring and developing the best enables the firm to concentrate on achieving a consistent competitive edge in meeting customer needs through superior products and services. Without this commitment to hiring winners, creative energies are siphoned off in dealing with what could have been preventable performance problems. Once again, success results from deliberate, conscious, and principled actions – from the very beginning.

*“When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.”*

William Arthur Ward

Hewitt Associates, a peak performing compensation and benefits consulting firm, does one of the best jobs I have seen in hiring and developing winners. In the decade that I did consulting and performance coaching training for Hewitt, I consistently experienced talented people who were encouraged to use their knowledge and skills in service to their clients. Hewitt makes a point of hiring and promoting “SWAN’s.” A simple acronym (SWAN) serves as a shorthand tool for evaluating candidates:

**S: Smart**

**W: Works hard and smart**

**A<sup>3</sup>: Ambitious Adaptable, Accountable**

**N: Nice**

If you need a swan, hire a swan – not a duck. Ducks cannot be turned into swans no matter what you do. A person has to have the aptitude to perform the job effectively. Even with a positive attitude, an inept person without the ability to attain a high skill level in the desired area will not perform effectively. Even a happy, well-adjusted, positive duck cannot soar with the swans. Make sure those you hire have the talent to perform with mastery.

Alignment, the third non-negotiable hiring criterion, addresses the necessity of assuring compatibility of the applicant with the organization’s mission, vision, values, and culture. Real magic occurs when the vision and values of the employee match the vision and values of the organization. If the mission, vision, and culture of the company do not ignite passion within an applicant, continue the search until you find one who can get excited about your organization. You cannot afford to “settle for” in hiring talent for your company.

Disney requires every employee to attend an extensive orientation taught by the faculty of Disney University. This thoughtfully planned orientation process integrates new employees into the traditions, culture, and the Disney way of doing business. New employees experience a sense of belonging to a special team that creates magic in the lives of their theme park guests. Even the Disney annual reports to stockholders emphasize such terms as “dreams,” “fun,” “joy,” “imagination,” and “magic.” (Built to Last, Collins and Porras, 1994) These acts of “deliberate success” produce great results on both The Bottom Line and The Human Element.

*“The question isn’t:  
‘What if we train people and they leave?’  
The question should be:  
‘What if we train people and they stay?’”*

Brian Tracy

One client of mine has a policy that before an individual can qualify for promotion, he or she must first find and/or develop an individual who is equal to or more effective than they are. They concentrate on hiring winners and building giants out of their people as long-term corporate strategies. Interestingly enough, this practice has resulted in generating a waiting list of peak performers who want to be a part of this company. (Imagine the competitive edge that you could create by having the best of the best seeking employment in your organization!) This strategic positioning of human resources results in higher profitability, greater customer satisfaction, and enhanced career fulfillment.

A shuttle bus driver taking me from the airport to the hotel volunteered that working this hotel is a “great” experience. *“At other places I’ve worked, they started me off with the lowly jobs that nobody else wanted. In this hotel, my very first assignments were important. In fact, now I’m even being cross-trained to use the computer at the front desk.”*

Just listening to his enthusiasm about his job and his employer prompted me to explore their corporate culture. (I can’t help it. It’s in my DNA!) Even as a guest in the hotel, I ended up interviewing a number of employees as well as the general manager. All spoke with pride about “their” hotel and the exemplary service they provided. At the root of this positive attitude and

productive climate was a strong commitment to hiring and developing winners – people who could be effectively empowered to function at their best. They didn’t just talk empowerment. They converted empowerment from a concept into tangible actions, starting with hiring people who demonstrated great customer service and teamwork attitudes. A cross training program built a strong foundation of back-up resources while positioning people to better understand the roles of employees working in other areas. Regular staff meetings kept people well informed about corporate progress while providing an opportunity to celebrate both individual and team successes in meeting corporate needs.

Even as a relatively new hotel in a highly competitive environment, their occupancy already exceeded an average of 95%, they operated in the black, and their customer satisfaction ratings were among the highest I have seen. Like with Southwest Airlines, their process of hiring and developing winners continues to generate positive results.

Achieving positive deliverables is not rocket science. In peak performing organizations, leaders simply do the fundamentals exceptionally well. And they start by hiring winners.

*“You can buy a pretty good dog,  
but you can’t buy his tail wagging.”*

Brian Tracy

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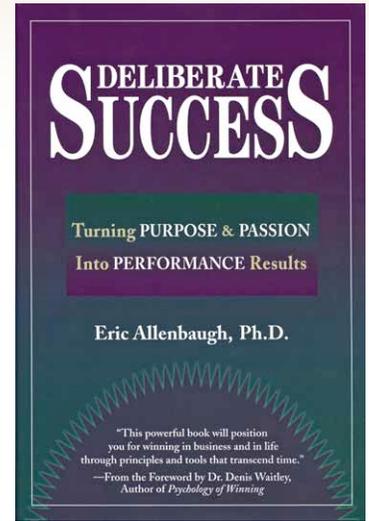
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