

Talent Sourcing for "Good to Great" Companies



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March 2007

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The most recognized researcher on how companies can progress from "Good to Great" and stay there is Jim Collins, in his book of that name. He demonstrates clearly that great leaders are the factor that makes the difference. That makes recruiting and developing leadership talent the most important task for any organization.

Let's ask then what "talent" is. To put it more understandably than many consultants do, one way to define it as "capacity." The question then becomes how to increase capacity, which is a bit trickier than hiring specific skills for specific tasks.

Seeking people who can fill in a chart, write a line of smart code in J2EE or perform other clearly defined tasks is straight forward... and unquestionably important in many cases. As a PMP (certified Project Management Professional) I certainly recognize this need, especially for project environments where there are finite timelines, external owners to please and other restrictions that channel the work toward very specific outcomes.

From the viewpoint of developing broader corporate, long-term visions, talent/capacity takes on its true importance. While skills can be taught straight forwardly (but can become obsolete in time - remember Cobol, Open VMS, DOS, Lotus 123 and others), capacity has more to do with the ability to learn on your own - as many talented technologists do with new systems. Capacity includes the ability to move yourself and your organization forward as things change.

Today the challenge of sourcing people who bring "capacity" is increased by the on-coming retirements of many baby-boomers and the need for more leadership skills as organizations continue to flatten and disperse globally and into virtual teams. Jim Collins tells us that finding the proper people ("getting the right people onto the bus") is the first task of creating a better leadership environment. Even the best CEOs he identified resolved this challenge before getting deeply into improved business plans and projects.

In our search for scarce talent, we need to consider all channels. Particularly for effective managers and leaders it's difficult to source from outside or off-shore, especially with new hires from school. Many simply haven't got sufficient experience. The myth of "born leaders" dies hard, but has finally been fully

put to rest by current experts such as Collins and others. Leadership develops with more experience in a wide variety of challenges.

Internal succession planning offers one channel, but with those sources getting tighter, it's more important than ever to look to marketing methods to develop a better "employment brand" to attract better external talent.

External recruiters who are willing to put in the extra work to help with this provide one option for developing the necessary strategies. Few Human Resource and line executives use these experts as effectively as they could, however, if they keep the focus only on finding specific skills.

In one assignment, I recommended a candidate without the listed skills at all. The surprised hiring manager asked why. My answer: I know him; he can do your job better than anyone else; trust me. She was glad she did. A month later I received a thank you note and an invitation to find more of the same. Of course, that can happen once by luck, but the right recruiter, working with a company's strategy can increase the odds dramatically.

Recognizing true general talent requires experience, maturity and appreciation for quality that goes beyond just skills. As in Good to Great, the best leaders plan ahead, recognize their needs and strategically seek the best talent "mix" to make great teams. That takes talent all around - from the leader, human resources and, at appropriate points, the right recruiter. The goal? Finding people who work themselves out their current job (and into a higher one) by building teams that learn continuously and don't depend only on the leader or the latest suite of specific skills.