

Firms find when their team is right, future is bright

BY KATHLEEN DAVIDSON
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Reporting the first NBA Championship for the Miami Heat, a radio sports commentator said, "It goes to show, it's not about having the best people ... but having the people who play best together."

So, what is the secret to developing the right mix?

First, you have to believe your company is worthy of attracting the right people. Mike Toney, president and chief executive of Conquest Training Co. in Phoenix, says small-business owners often feel they are not good enough to draw the best people.

"When I'm dealing with CEOs of small firms who think they cannot afford the people they want, we help them turn this thinking around," Toney says.

First he suggests a review of the company values and goals, then establishing a hiring program that builds for tomorrow rather than responding to the obstacles of today. In addition, it is vital that you get people to start working "on" their business rather than "in" it.

By working "on" his company, William Hinzs of Western National Bank team far surpassed aggressive three-year projections during their initial year in operation. The Phoenix bank's founder and chief executive explains that from the beginning, they adopted the initial model used by Starbucks

— to spend money on employee development and customer service rather than advertising and marketing.



William Hinzs

"Creating a true team atmosphere doesn't happen by accident," Hinzs says. "It seemed crazy for a startup company like ours to spend this kind of money on employee development, but that's exactly why we did it."

Each employee goes through a comprehensive eight-week training program that culminates in participants sharing emotionally bonded feelings and a family-like commitment. They stay on track via mandatory monthly meetings where all employees come together for two hours, after work, to discuss the best practices of fellow employees.

Hinzs says it doesn't cost much and provides a structured forum for exchanging good ideas along with recognizing and motivating the entire team.

"The better we understand each other's jobs and personalities, the better we'll serve our team and our customers," he says. "But you have to have the discipline and systems to consistently promote communication, understanding and appreciation. And it all starts at the top."

Patricia Leach, president and co-founder of Phoenix-based HomeBase Youth Services, agrees.

"The culture of accountability, integrity and open communication starts at the top. Developing trust creates a commitment within the team that is key to moving the organization forward," she says.

The nonprofit has grown from a staff of seven, helping a small group of homeless youth in Tempe in 1991, to a staff of full continuum of care to homeless youth statewide.

"As you work to assemble an exceptional management team, people will self-select out," Leach says. "Sometimes, you find that



Patricia Leach

the people who got you to a certain level are not the same people who will take you to the next level."

HomeBase also has used Toney's Conquest team and says the concepts have "really helped us to stretch and grow."

According to Conquest, team development begins by focusing on the six S's:

- **Society** — What is the company culture you want to create and maintain?
- **Structure** — Methods and policies to insure tracking and accountability.
- **Strategy** — What is the direction you want your company to take? (Owners need to be the primary architects of their strategy versus hiring outsiders who have their own agendas and may corrupt the vision.)
- **Systems** — Design an "on-boarding" program specific to every position. This 90-day plan is designed to help people learn and embrace the society, mission, vision and skills needed to be successful in your organization. Begin by asking them to read the vision and mission statement and develop a presentation to inform the board of directors. Then have them write a strategic plan for their staff and so on. At the end of 90 days, employees will either graduate into the company or make their exit.

• **Style** — Determine the CEO's style. Assemble a support staff to complement it. You don't want a bunch of "yes men" but a team that is committed to powerful conversations. Healthy conflict is important and should stem from a commitment to the firm versus individual arrogance. Remember, too much harmony can lead to dysfunctional companies.

• **Skills** — Develop an interview process robust enough to peel off the candidate's mask. Have candidates do something objective rather than subjective. If you are looking for someone who can make cold calls, hand them the phone and ask them to demonstrate.

GET CONNECTED

HomeBase Youth Services:

www.hbys.org

Conquest Training Co.:

www.conquesttraining.com

Western National Bank:

www.wnbank.com



Mike Toney advises small businesses to set up a hiring program that builds for the future rather than just dealing with the problems of the day.

