

## STRATEGY # 3: MAKE YOUR PEOPLE YOUR BRAND

Early in my career I thought that a strong brand was the most important thing an organization could have. Many people think of a brand in terms of a product or logo, but I soon discovered that in reality, your *people* are your brand. No matter how good your products and services are, you can't achieve true excellence unless you attract great people, develop great people, and keep great people. Once I learned how to do this, my life as an executive became a whole lot easier because I was blessed with direct reports who were as pleasant as they were competent. Everyone on the team had total respect for everyone else, both as professionals and as individuals, and I never had to worry about our ability to implement a decision, no matter how challenging the situation may have seemed.

Like practicing good preventive medicine, hiring and promoting the right people will spare you a lot of painful and costly problems. The suggestions that follow take time and effort, but they will give you a competitive advantage that can't be easily imitated.

- 1. Define the perfect candidate.** When you recruit or hire someone, it's vital to be totally clear on what you're looking for. Exactly what qualities do you want in the person you hire? What sort of skills do you expect him or her to have? What do you want him or her to be able to accomplish? Such questions should be contemplated carefully and thoroughly by everyone involved in the decision. You may not always find the perfect person, but you will surely get a better one if you aim for the ideal. Regardless of the position you're hiring for, I recommend evaluating candidates according to the following four areas of competency:
  - **Technical competence.** This simply means having the requisite knowledge and skills to do the job.
  - **Management competence.** Every employee should be disciplined, self-controlled, and organized. I always looked for people who had a system of planning their days. When you're evaluating a potential hire, make sure he or she has an effective organizational system.
  - **Technological competence.** Everyone needs to understand and utilize available technologies relevant to his or her position. And the decision makers need to know about cutting-edge technologies to stay ahead of the curve, and they always need to be looking for the next technological advancement that can improve results.
  - **Leadership competence.** Since this whole book is about leadership, nothing needs to be said here except this: The ability to lead is something to look for in everyone you consider hiring; no matter what the position is. A head chef may be a great culinary artist, but if he or she does not hire the right people, train them well, and inspire them to prepare every single dish perfectly, he or she will quickly end up cooking for one.

*"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."*

Albert Schweitzer

*"Visible Learning: When teachers see learning through the eyes of the student and students see themselves as their own teachers."*

John Hattie

*"In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock."*

Thomas Jefferson