

Seven Characteristics of Highly Effective Entrepreneurial Employees

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STARTING UP: Practical Advice for Entrepreneurs

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Fast growing, entrepreneurial organizations need employees who regularly demonstrate entrepreneurial characteristics and work habits. Management of entrepreneurial companies must work diligently to recognize, identify and attract this type of employee during the recruitment process to assure a steady stream of the people with the "Right Stuff" to fuel growth of the venture.

Employees come in all shapes and sizes with all sorts of different skills and quirks. Their outlook and approach have been tempered by past experiences, good or bad. In the relatively short period of time that you have to do hiring, you have to cut through the prospective employee's resume and verbal statements and figure out if he or she has the "Right Stuff". This is really important because just as "a bad apple will spoil the barrel", an employee with the "Wrong Stuff" will drag your whole effort down. It would be one thing if a Wrong Stuff employee simply didn't contribute, but it is worse than that - he usually sucks up scare management time, creates diversions for Right Stuff employees - you get the picture.

So what are the characteristics of highly effective "Right Stuff" entrepreneurial employees? Here are a few to keep in mind as you interview potential new hires, you probably can think of others.

Ability to Deal With Risk. An entrepreneur has to operate effectively in an environment filled with risk. The Right Stuff Employee can deal with risk and uncertainty. He is able to make progress towards goals and is able to make decisions when lacking one or several critical resources or data.

Results Oriented. The Right Stuff Employee is results oriented, she takes ownership to get the task done. She is a "can do" person who demonstrates common sense in her decision and actions and is able to cut through and resolve problems that divert others. Her business judgment is sound and becomes stronger with each experience, decision or recommendation. While supervisors and managers may disagree with her ultimate recommendation, they usually agree that the alternatives she presents are reasonable for the situation at hand.

Energy. The Right Stuff Employee has high levels of enthusiasm and energy; he consistently generates output that is higher than could be reasonably expected. He is fully committed to the organization, its goals and overall success.

Not only does he desire to make a contribution to results, he needs to see the results of his contributions quickly, not measured in years! He will seek out an organization that solicits and acts upon his ideas, gives credit where credit is due and points out errors and poor decisions quickly and clearly. He performs effectively with limited supervision and is able to self-motivate and set priorities with minimal guidance.

Growth Potential. The Right Stuff Employee's reach exceeds her grasp today. Today's Right Stuff Employee is often next year's supervisor and a department manager soon thereafter. She

is willing to accept much higher levels of responsibility that is the norm for her position, title, experience level or salary. She acts as a strong role model, trains and coaches others, and soon begins to assume supervisory responsibilities, again much earlier than would be expected in a normal corporate environment.

Team Player. The Right Stuff Employee is a true team player, she recognizes how her role contributes to the overall effort and success of the organization. She accepts accountability and ownership for her area of responsibility and expects others on the team to do the same. She also recognizes the roles and contributions of others and applauds their efforts sincerely.

Multitasking Ability. The Right Stuff Employee is flexible to accept new duties, assignments and responsibilities. He can perform more than one role until the incremental duties and functions assumed can be assigned to co-workers in newly defined roles. He is also willing to dig in and do grunt work tasks which eventually will be performed by lower level employees.

Improvement Oriented. The Right Stuff Employee is more than willing to challenge in a constructive way existing procedures and systems; to her the status quo is temporary. She suggests changes and improvements frequently and encourages others to do so also.

Right Stuff Employees are easier to manage in some ways but require a higher level of management involvement in others. Ordinary (average) employees will not produce extraordinary results over time; Right Stuff Employees will generally produce extraordinary results consistently over time. Unfortunately, unless properly motivated, managed and rewarded, Right Stuff Employees could perform at lower levels and only produce ordinary results. So what makes a Right Stuff Manager?

First of all the Right Stuff Manager must herself have the characteristics of the Right Stuff Employee. Beyond that she must have the basic skill set of sound business judgment, practical hands-on experience, general management skills and common sense. She must be committed to and contribute to the organization's vision and mission and must convey this commitment in multiple ways: written, verbal and by actions. She needs an awareness, understanding and interest in the technology trends that affect the venture and its customers.

Externally, the Right Stuff Manager must be able to identify and build creative strategic relationships, especially for partnering opportunities in areas of limited resources.

Internally, he must effectively produce and manage change as the organization evolves, gaining enthusiastic support for change and improvements from the Right Stuff Employees in the ranks.

So when you interview each new employee or manager, look beyond the mere facts of the resume and ask yourself is this a "Right Stuff" person? You are most likely interviewing the person because of the resume. Now is the time to put the resume aside and focus on the "Right Questions".

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