Why Your Creative Org Can’t Afford To Get Talent Wrong

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The beating heart of the creative services industry is people.

Human capital is the greatest asset of any creative service company. However, as an industry, we are seeing average agency turnover rates that hover around 30%. Staff costs represent the single largest expense area on an agency P&L, so staffing and team-building represent a significant opportunity for agencies. Here are a few considerations that are paramount when building teams and structuring talent operations.

Prioritize fit over talent

Every company wants the best talent. But it’s important to understand the difference between finding great talent and finding the right talent who is also the right fit.

Fit is about talent that can seamlessly integrate into your organization. These individuals should share your values, complement other individuals in the building and, most importantly, be aligned with the opportunity and expectations in the role.

Fit is more important than talent. Good fits tend to stay

longer, are happier, act as guardians of the culture, and self-regulate to ensure that standards are kept high. The best way to find great fits is to create a process for hiring. The process should focus on who conducts the interviews, how many rounds of interviews, and what sort of questions are you looking to get answered from each interview.

Investing the time into this process will repeatedly provide a return on investment.

Faster hiring can lead to suboptimal outcomes

So often the mandate to the talent team is to try to fill open roles as quickly as possible. Without speaking in absolutes, hiring faster leads to higher turnover versus sticking to your established process.

There are many reasons a company may feel pressure to fill an open role quickly; a new client win, organically growing business, investing in a new discipline. Businesses of all sizes have been in this position before. When you hire fast, the standards that would normally be in place tend to buckle a bit.

Filling the role becomes more important than filling the role with the right person. Hiring the wrong person creates a potential domino effect. It can create different situations that take up time and money and risks alienating others on the team. Sticking to the formula you've created is going to pay for itself in spades over the long run.

Be wary of promoting the wrong skill sets

In our industry, promotions are often based on individual success. Being great at what you do is very important. But, being a skilled writer, art director, strategist, account person, etc., does not necessarily translate into being a great manager. The world is full of examples of talented individuals who have struggled to translate those skills into

being great managers.

Wayne Gretzky is the greatest hockey player of all time, but he was not a very good head coach. Phil Jackson was an NBA role player who averaged 6.7 points per game as a player but is arguably one of the greatest coaches of all time. High individual achievers can struggle to understand why others around them can't just do what they do. This leads to frustration and employee dissatisfaction.

Sometimes those who may be good or even very good are better able to translate the experiences from having had a slightly different path into being an incredible mentor or coach. As an industry, too much focus has been placed on the outcome of the work, and not enough time or resources have been put into prepping talent with the requisite skills to be great leaders.

Consider internal growth versus looking externally

I have no data to support this assertion, but it represents a belief of mine: Companies that have low turnover, great culture, and are continuously growing are companies that prioritize promoting from within (especially with roles and opportunities that are more senior).

Promoting from within sends so many positive signals to your team. It shows that hard work will be rewarded, acknowledges that the people in the building are the ones who have helped build and grow a company, and it also represents continuity within the organization. As a manager, I've prioritized trying to build teams from the bottom up. Finding great talent, working with them, investing in them, and getting them to a place where they are ready to be promoted. When they are promoted, hiring someone underneath them to allow for

management experience and keeps a high standard in place.

Talent is one of the biggest differentiators for how businesses grow. Finding the right fits, putting those people in the right roles, and creating an atmosphere that will allow them to thrive. If you can do that, you'll be multiple steps ahead of the competition and well-positioned to grow your business. You'll save money by not having to rehire and retrain, and that saved money can be invested in other areas that will continue to accelerate your growth.

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