

Bring in the Right People: Don't Be Afraid to Hire People Smarter Than You

The following is an excerpt from The Leadership Genius of George W. Bush: 10 Commonsense Lessons from the Commander in Chief by Carolyn B. Thompson and James W. Ware. Thompson is head of Training Systems, headquartered in Frankfort, a business training, recruitment and retention specialist.

Even those who are not ardent supporters of President George W. Bush will find his leadership style effective and adaptable to their own situations. Whether a CEO or head of the PTA, the book outlines leadership styles which are useful, successful, and easily adapted. Besides being a good resource, the book is eminently readable - a pleasant way to spend an evening.

"The next challenge was to build a strong team of effective people to implement my agenda. I worked hard to recruit the very best."

—George W. Bush

Q: What do the following words and phrases have in common?

- sought advice from close associates
- Bush's team of headhunters
- choosing
- had come highly recommended
- I found him
- I put on a full-court press
- recommendation from
- convinced ... to join our team
- recruited
- persuaded

A: They are all words used by George W. Bush, or about him, in any discussion about bringing in the right people.

In most organizations, we say that we're going to "interview" someone;—Bush says he's going to "recruit" someone. We say we're going to "decide on who we want to hire"; Bush says he's going to "choose." We say we're going to "offer the person the job"; he says he's going to "invite the person to join our team." We say we're going to "advertise the position"; Bush says "I found the person." What's the difference between Bush's words and ours?

His are about selling himself, the organization, the position, and the position to the right person for the situation. Ours are about the job candidates' selling themselves, and us deciding to buy or not.

Bush's process is about research, personality fit, and position. He determines what's needed for a particular position and who has those skills, characteristics, and attributes. He discovers whether the position and organization match someone before he interviews that person. Interviews thus can focus on how the person's per-

sonality melds with Bush's, and he prides himself on being a good judge of people.

We believe that Bush's way works (and believe it when we say we're not using information about their backgrounds to discriminate against them; one of us is an HR professional!). Like Bush, we use such information to understand where the person is coming from. Doing that allows Bush to get a sense of what a person believes and where he or she is going. He hears candidates' core values and learns their priorities by asking about their background and family. Core values and priorities rarely roll off the tongue in response to a question like "What are your core values?" (They do, of course, for you, now that you've read chapter 1, "Do You Stand For?") In fact, you need to know your own values so that you can determine whether a job candidate will match well with yours.)

Learning peoples' core values and priorities and dealing with them about their backgrounds in general is legally risky. You'll have information that can't be proven to be related directly to the skills needed for the position. Nevertheless, this information will tell you things about the candidates' characteristics and attributes that are hard to verify through research alone. An interview of this sort tells Bush, and it can tell you, about core values. Knowing that their values match yours is crucial to bringing in the right person. Bush takes a legal risk that he might be called upon to prove that he didn't use information about a person's background to discriminate against that person.

We take that legal risk too, and we take it even though because the benefits (a match with our core values outweigh the risk (hiring the wrong person). Bush's thorough researching before interviewing keeps the risk from coming ability down. By learning what he needs for a particular position and only talking with people who have those skills, characteristics, and attributes, he only interviews people who are so close to right that all it takes is the person — and he's a master at this!

Clearly, Bush's leadership genius in bringing in the right people lies not just in his research and personality abilities, but also in his willingness to hire people who are smarter than he is—no matter whose approach they were. So check your ego at the door, and don't mess around with the recruiting!

(Excerpted with permission from The Leadership Genius of George W. Bush, pp. 81, 82, 87, 88, 89; Wiley & Sons, 2003. Buy it at Amazon.com)