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WHITE PAPER

Workplace DNA: The Proper Profile

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In scientific circles, DNA is better known as deoxyribonucleic acid. It is defined as an essential component of all living matter, and carries the genetic information necessary for the organization and functioning of most living cells. From criminal convictions to scientific revelations in the very meaning of life, DNA is now and will continue to be a powerful aspect of our lives.

So what does DNA have to do with an organization and its people? Everything, for these three letters, applied to the optimum functioning of a company, could represent the difference between whether or not your company achieves great results.

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Dispelling the Myths

Myths abound in the workplace regarding the availability, motivations, and desires of today's employee. Here are four dangerous workforce myths that need to be forever buried and replaced by new realities.

MYTH #1

You just can't find good people these days.

REALITY #1

There are millions of great employees in the workplace.

To achieve great results, you need to clearly understand who you are looking for, the types of people who will best fit within your culture and connect to your purpose. Then, you need to create progressive ways to attract these (typically) already employed heroes into your company.

There are plenty of great people around. The key is whether you are willing to do what is necessary to get them interested in your company and connected with your journey to greatness.

MYTH #2

People only work for the money.

REALITY #2

Great people work for more than a paycheck.

Actually, this myth is partially true. Great people do want competitive pay. Great people know what the prevailing wage is in their area. A pay range slightly above the norm is enough to get the attention of the best people in the market.

But today's top talent, although expecting competitive compensation for their efforts, work for more than mere money – they work to make a difference. Isn't that what you want from your workforce?

MYTH #3

People are your greatest asset.

REALITY #3

The RIGHT people are your greatest asset.

People are not your greatest asset. If that were true, then all you would need to do to increase the assets of your company is simply add more people onto your payroll! Even filling your company with highly skilled professionals is no sure bet of achieving great results.

Why? It takes far more than mere skills and knowledge within a workforce to achieve great results; it also takes a special connection to its purpose and culture.

Who are the right people? Those with the right stuff, the corporate DNA, the ones who understand and embrace the purpose, live the culture, and are committed to helping the organization achieve great results.

Give me a company filled with purpose-aligned, culture-loving people, and I'll win every time!

MYTH #4

Great people make great employees anywhere they work

REALITY #4

Great people are only great within the right environment.

A great employee at The Home Depot would not necessarily be a great employee at Southwest Airlines. A great employee at 3M would not necessarily be a great employee at Office Depot. A great employee at Fairview Health Systems in Minneapolis, Minnesota would not necessarily be a great employee at Bayfront Health Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida.

What makes for a great employee in your company is different than what makes a great employee at your competitors. You are looking for a unique combination of things, the right stuff, the DNA that sets apart your best people from all the others.



The DNA Profile

To achieve great results, you must attract and retain the right people. Therefore you and all your management team must have a clear understanding of what constitutes a potentially great employee and how to best leverage their strengths to achieve greatness.

It begins with uncovering the attitudes, traits, dispositions, motivations, interests, and commitments of your current top talent as a baseline for finding and keeping more just like them. Developing your company's unique DNA profile will answer such questions as:

- Who are our great people?
- What makes them special?
- What do our great employees actually do that distinguishes them from other employees? (behaviors, actions, work performance)
- Why do they do what they do at such high performance levels? (motivation, commitment)
- What, if any, are their special characteristics, likes, or dislikes?
- What, if any, distinctive personality characteristics distinguish them from average or below average performers?
- What skills, knowledge, or attitude differences are there between top and average performers?

Through a thorough and systematic approach to answering these and more basic questions, you will gain an in-depth perspective of your top talent grounded in reality that will serve as a framework from which to recruit and retain more great people.

Here are some “best practice” examples of DNA profiles from a couple great companies.

Southwest Airlines

Mini-Herbs. This is how Southwest Airlines describes their DNA. They look for people who exhibit the same characteristics as their legendary co-founder and former CEO, Herb Kelleher.

Southwest has identified seven key characteristics that represent their corporate DNA, each of which happen to epitomize Kelleher himself. Regardless of the position type or level, all applicants are judged on the following seven criteria:

- Cheerfulness
- Optimism
- Decision-making
- Team spirit
- Communication
- Self-confidence
- Self-esteem

Every applicant is rated on all seven dimensions by everyone that interviews them (sometimes as many as 20 employees) on a five-point scale where 1 = very low on the dimension, 5 = very high on the dimension.

Southwest is so serious about finding the right DNA that if any applicant receives a score of three below from any one interviewer on any one dimension, the applicant is automatically eliminated from consideration!

Southwest Airlines understands its unique corporate DNA and fanatically recruits (and retains) to it.

Yahoo!

A Bunch of Yahoos. Yahoo!, the innovative search engine company, has identified four core DNA attributes of their great people.

- People skills
- Spheres of influence
- Zoom in, zoom out
- Passion for life

People skills, as the name implies, refers to an applicant's interpersonal skills.

Spheres of influence alludes to the applicant's “little black book” of contacts – are they well connected to others with the same attributes. Yahoo! leverages the personal contacts of potentially great employees to bring even more great people into the company.

Zoom in, zoom out is Yahoo!'s approach to finding people who can think tactically as well as strategically.

Finally, Yahoo! wants people who are not only passionate about their subject area but also passionate about life in general. They have found that their very best people have a zest for life above and beyond their current job.

With just two “best practice” examples from my database, it is hopefully apparent that great companies take the time to study what makes their top talent tick, look beyond the popular workplace myths, and have developed ways to measure the dimensions to better identify potential talent, those with the right DNA profile.



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