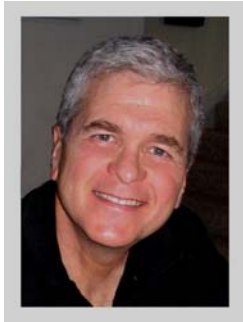


Honor the Talent that Makes Your Business Productive



By Leigh Branham

(Adapted from guest column that appeared originally in THE KANSAS CITY STAR.)

We hear the word "talent" tossed about quite a bit these days because we know that finding and engaging the right talent will be the key to surviving in the service-driven new economy.

So it seems fitting to ask the question: Why do so many companies fail to recognize and fully employ the talents of their workers?

Most experts agree that only about one-fourth of American workers are truly engaged — that is, committed, productive, doing what they do best, and consistently giving their best effort. If this is true, it means that a depressingly large number of Americans are being deprived of their right to meaningful work. It also means that companies are failing to capitalize on their greatest competitive asset.

In my 20-plus years of helping people identify their best talents, I observed five things that kept getting in the way:

1. Losing sight of talent by overemphasizing knowledge, credentials and experience. Just look at most want ads and you'll see the job requirements listed tend to be mostly knowledge-based or experienced-based—ones that make candidates eligible, but not necessarily suitable, for the position. Companies repeatedly screen out candidates with better native ability to do the job because they may lack a knowledge that could be acquired. Why not list the talent profile required in the want ads as well?

2. Hiring in a hurry. Many companies are asking the question "Can you start on Monday?" when they should be asking questions designed to uncover proof of talent. If it's important to hire the right person, why not do it right the first time, beginning with updating the job description, using behavioral interviewing or validated assessments, and taking the time to check references?

3. Viewing workers as interchangeable parts. Sad to say, but many managers seem to believe that people can be bent, shaped, folded or mutilated to fit any job, especially lower-level ones. They often "micromanage," prescribing that jobs be done "the one best way", thereby squelching the opportunity for the individual to achieve results using his or her own unique gifts. These managers either need to be replaced or made to understand that a person's talent needs to be matched with the role.

