

Hire the best brains

A good leader knows how to inspire smart employees to do their best

A FRIEND of mine attributes his success to working with people who are smarter than him. And he is not just making a modest statement — he means it.

He believes that being a good leader does not mean that you have to be smarter than everyone else. A good leader needs to know how to harness the strengths of others towards the success of his business.

Another business leader I know says that all he does is facilitate and provide the environment for smart solutions. He jokes that all his team asks of him is to “get out of the way, let them do what’s required and give him the credit”.

If leading is that easy, why is there such a brain drain in some organisations? And why do so many leaders lament about mediocrity within their organisations?

The solution does not lie with the talent part of the equation. It lies with the leader and the organisation, in particular, the culture of the organisation.

Diversity in work styles

In my experience, leaders who succeed in attracting and retaining smart people have some things in common. They are willing to accept differences, draw upon the strengths of the individuals and, most of all, are able to accept and encourage diversity in work styles.

This means being able to let people do it their way. Smart people cannot accept a one-size-fits-all mentality; they resist being squeezed into a “box” as this is what they have had to encounter most of their lives in school and in the workplace.

When they meet someone who is willing to accept them for who they are instead of expecting them to fall in line, these people give more of themselves. But first they must believe in the cause.

Challenging the norm

In order to believe in the cause, they



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ask questions and will challenge the norm. In a conservative organisation culture, this may seem threatening. But isn't this what you are paying them for — their brains?

And if they are using them, they will ask questions. They will ask why and why not, and they will not stop till they get an answer that they believe in.

Telling it like it is

They will not hesitate to tell you if something you say does not make sense. To them, it's a healthy debate, it is not about looking good and making someone else look bad, and it is certainly not about agreeing with what the boss says.

They feel that they are there to add value and their idea of adding value includes speaking their mind.

You cannot employ a smart person and expect them to just accept everything you say just because you are the boss.

Room for expression

Creating a conducive environment is critical for nurturing brilliant ideas and innovation. Smart people need to be able to play and enjoy their work.

Trying to squeeze someone creative into a sterile environment is like putting them in a strait-jacket. Some managers struggle with this and in the process turn their best employees against them.

Routines are boring

One way to send a smart worker out the door is to bully him with routines. Every organisation has corpo-

rate tyrants who try to make people conform and follow the “rules”.

A good leader is able to accommodate some exceptions but is also able to show these individuals when they are out of line and need to be more respectful of others.

Driven by inspiration

Instead of threatening your staff, you can get a lot more done by inspiring them. This is a key ingredient that will keep the brains within organisations from leaving.

Keeping people inspired requires the leader to listen to opinions, build a strategy and show a path that is challenging and yet fun.

A good leader will not feel threatened by other people's good ideas. They may be smart but unsavvy about organisational politics; or they

may lack your management experience and leadership skills.

It starts at the top

When you want people to think out of the box, you must also be ready for them to make mistakes. When you want someone to take ownership, you must also be ready for him to tell you to back off.

Leaders are responsible for the type of environment they create. So the next time you hear a leader lamenting that he cannot find good, smart people, ask him: “What have you done to create an attractive environment?” Remember, it always starts at the top! - Source:ST/ANN

● **ARTICLE by Lalita Nithiyanandan, Kelly Outsourcing and Consulting Group.**