



## SELLING SMART

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# Winning Customer Service

## World-class service organizations require world-class employees

**I**N MY OCTOBER 2015 ARTICLE “A WINNING WORKPLACE,” I wrote about the importance of employee engagement and creating an organization that top talent want to be a part of. In this article, we’ll focus further on the people in your tire business and how to hire to support a world-class customer service organization.

### Start at the Top

Building and sustaining a true world-class customer service organization starts with leadership. That means owners and managers must be actively involved in the customer service effort, lead by example and continuously demonstrate high customer service standards and proper behaviors.

Unfortunately, many owners and managers take the position that they have “people for that” when, in fact, the most important people are themselves. Everyone in the business is in customer service and plays an important role in each customer’s experience. Leadership should never be an exception to this. Fittingly, a CEO of a world-class customer service organization should also be considered the chief Customer Experience Officer.

Equally important as customer relations, managers should also always treat their employees in a manner that is consistent with the way you want them to treat customers. Average managers do not, yet they expect their

personnel to excel when it comes to positive customer interactions.

As J. W. “Bill” Marriott Jr., chairman of the board of Marriott International Inc., said, “If you take care of your employees they will take care of your customers and your business will take care of itself.”

### Hire People that Fit Your “World-Class” Model

Workplace culture is a major driver of a world-class customer service so it’s critical you hire people that best fit the model you’re seeking to achieve.

Excellent insight can be found in Jim Collins best-selling book, *Good to Great*, in the chapter titled “First who... then what.” There, Jim wrote how research revealed that great companies, “Start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats.”

This methodology is in direct opposition to what an average tire business does. Confronted with a demanding workload that is stressing out existing staff members, an average tire business will often hire anybody to help ease the strain. While a less-than-desirable hire may provide a Band-Aid and the appearance of helping your cause, the business usually suffers where it matters most, results.

Remember, every employee represents your brand. Your best employees are fully engaged and motivated, improving workplace morale and productivity. They consistently do the right things the right way without being tightly managed. As your brand ambassadors, they typically do a great job interacting with customers, strengthening existing relationships and winning new customers.

A bad hire typically has the opposite effect, harming workplace morale and productivity while simultaneously putting customer relationships at risk – costing the business lost sales and profits.

As Jim Collin’s wrote, “When in doubt, don’t hire – keep looking. If you have the wrong people, it doesn’t matter whether you discover the right

### TAKEAWAYS

- > Owners and managers are the most important people involved in customer service.
- > Every employee represents your business’ brand.
- > Hire employees based on personality and passion.

direction – you still won't have a great company."

So, if you want to be great, you must have the right people on your business bus and that begins with how they get on your bus in the first place, your hiring process.

Consistent with the hiring habits of many of the world's best customer service organizations, here's a couple essentials:

## 1) Hire for Personality

Tire and auto service businesses, as well as any other type of service business, are inherently people driven. To maximize your chances of success, you must hire people with the right character and personality to connect with and engage customers.

Who are these people? In this case, past performance is a great predictor of future results. High-

achievers in customer service and sales are typically outgoing, friendly, articulate, upbeat with a "can do" attitude. Look at your current top performers and it's very likely that they possess these same traits. Therefore, these personality characteristics should serve as the template for your recruiting efforts.

This "Hire for Attitude, Train for Skill" philosophy is not new. Nordstrom, The Apple Store, Southwest Airlines, just to name a few, have long adopted this as the core of their hiring practice.

Can't we just hire an experienced individual and then train him on these social "soft" skills? You could, but I urge you to keep in mind that you could triple your training investment and likely still end up far behind where you would have been if you hired the right person to begin with.

This back to behavioral modification, or teaching someone a new skill. While you can teach someone the tire or auto service business it is, relatively speaking, really hard, to teach someone personality.

As Herb Kelleher, co-founder and former CEO of Southwest Airlines, said, "We don't care much about education and expertise, because we can train people. We hire attitudes."

Like Southwest, previous tire industry experience has little to do with the future success of a candidate. I have personally trained numerous novice employees with less than a year of tire/auto service industry experience who are routinely outperforming their veteran counterparts mainly because they had the right personality to begin with.

## 2) Hire for Passion

To build a world-class organization you must hire people with passion. Passion powers performance and is a key trait of high-achievers.

World-class companies know that passionate, enthusiastic employees

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A successful tire business employee's passion is rarely, if ever, tires or working in a tire business.

They must have a passion for customer service, a passion to serve, a passion to help others, and, above all, a passion to succeed.

are the best kind to hire and retain. They typically work harder and seek to improve themselves and their performance on the job. And, from a sales standpoint, enthusiastic employees naturally have far greater customer engagement than those that are dispassionate.

When interviewing candidates for your tire business, how many times has this happened?

**You:** "So tell me, John, what is it that attracted you to the tire business?"

**John:** "Oh, I just love tires! I love the look of them, their rotational properties, that great rubber smell. Ever since I was a kid my dream has been to work in a tire business!"

Zero. I bet that's how many times that's happened in an interview. And that's absolutely acceptable. A successful tire business employee's passion is rarely, if ever, tires or working in a tire business.

However, they must have a passion for customer service, a passion to serve, a passion to help others, and, above all, a passion to succeed.

Tying these two hiring recommendations together, Sir Richard Branson, billionaire founder of Virgin Group published "How I Hire: Focus On Personality" on LinkedIn writing, "If you can find people who are fun, friendly, caring and love helping others you are on to a winner. Personality is the key."

If getting by is your goal then you'll probably be okay hiring anybody and training them your business, but, if you want to be great, then you'll be far better off hiring the right people from the start! **TR**

*Steve Ferrante is the CEO of Sale Away LLC. As producer and host of the highly-acclaimed "Pinnacle Performance Training" program, Steve is recognized as the leading provider of sales, customer service and corporate culture training and coaching for independent tire/auto service businesses across North America. Steve can be reached at 866-721-6086 ext. 701 or [steve@saleawayllc.com](mailto:steve@saleawayllc.com). Steve Ferrante, CEO, Sale Away LLC.*