

From the CEO to the low man on the totem pole, every person we hire has some effect on our organizational culture. Obviously, the higher up the ladder, the greater the opportunity for impact. And one lower-tier person has a lot more impact in a ten person organization than in a 10,000 person organization.

We hire because we need a skill or capacity. So our focus tends to drift toward the hard skills the position requires. But according to most surveys, lacking the skills to do the job is not the top reason people leave their jobs – voluntarily or involuntarily. Character and soft skills are usually the culprits. Yet there isn't one perfect model of character and soft skills that fits every organization.

A company I worked for hired a highly skilled manager from within our industry. We thought it was a real coup to get her. But her hard core leadership style didn't work in our highly relational culture and she was gone within a few months. It could easily have been the opposite – a highly collaborative manager won't fit well in a highly command-and-control culture.

Losing someone within a few months is expensive and painful, but that's still better than keeping a person on because of their skills despite the cultural cancer they continue to spread.

So how do you get the right people to begin with? Consider these tips a starting point:

1. **How clearly have you defined the desirable traits of your culture?** If the picture isn't clear, you'll have a hard time telling if a candidate fits in. If multiple people are doing the hiring, not having a measuring stick of well-articulated cultural values guarantees hiring a lot of misfits. It also helps to know what undesirable traits are creeping into your culture that you want to guard against reinforcing.
2. **How clearly have you defined the type of personality and soft skills this position requires?** A healthy culture doesn't mean everyone's a clone. Healthy blending of differences creates a healthy culture. Identify the most important characteristics the person in this role needs in order to interact well on your team and get the job done.
3. **Spend more time interviewing for cultural fit than for hard skills.** A few months ago, a panel of highly successful tech entrepreneurs were discussing culture in technology startups. The panelists were passionate about the role of culture in their success. They told stories of weeks or even months spent assuring a candidate's cultural fit before hiring. They all agreed they would pass on a top performer if the cultural fit wasn't there. "Never compromise culture" was their hiring mantra. Use *behavior-based interviewing* (Google it) to explore how a candidate has historically responded to situations rather than hypothetical "what would you do" questions.

The quip is often (dubiously) attributed to Peter Drucker, but whoever said it was right: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast". Every leader's job is to protect a healthy culture.



**enLumen Leadership Services:** *Lighting your path to better leadership.*