

Creating a great organization

Learning the three secrets to carwash success:
Hiring right, training right and managing right.

BY STEVE GAUDREAU | CONTRIBUTING WRITER



How do you create a great team of people in any business? Most management theorists tell us that there are three critical areas to focus on.

- First, hire people whose abilities and motivation fit the job.
- Second, train them in your operation so they have the knowledge and skills to perform successfully.
- Third, retain your good people by providing a sense of purpose for their work, manage them professionally and compensate them well.

Hire right, train right, and manage right. Simple, right? Well, conceptually, yes. As a practical matter, however, it is the most difficult task that any organization has to face on a day-to-day basis.

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Harrison Hemphill, the Operations Manager for The Car Wash Barn, conducts a group interview for the Customer Service Attendant position.



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If you want to know how much of a challenge the job of managing people is, ask yourself how often are you impressed with the positive attitude and great service you receive anywhere as a customer. It's not very often, is it? This is because it is very hard to get people to do exactly what you want in any business. It is, however, doable.

Most organizations focus primarily on the "manage right" part of the equation. Some companies, after experiencing less success than they want, move back chronologically and begin to work on the "train right" side of the formula, and that, of course, helps improve results to a great degree. Without question, however, the area that is least worked on is the "hire right" aspect of the equation. And, from my experience, it is the most important part of the whole people management puzzle.

How many times in your career have you had a high performer in a position and you have remarked, "I sure wish I could clone that person." And, if it was a manager, you probably went on to say, "If I had several more like this one, I would go out and get the money to open more locations."

The focus of this article is to demonstrate how it is possible to find and match people's natural abilities and motivation correctly to the job. This is true even in the carwash industry where turnover can be very high. Although I have compiled information on several different positions in the

How The Car Wash Barn uses surveys

Curtis and Mike Emmons are the owners of The Car Wash Barn, a four-location conveyor carwash company located in Killeen, TX. They also own several other companies, including a construction firm, a self-storage business and an entertainment center company. As they have expanded, they have used the ProScan Survey as part of the recruiting process to carefully select the people whose natural abilities fit the job.

Curtis Emmons uses the survey and job model to hire for every position at the carwash, from the operations manager to attendants. Mike Emmons has used the ProScan for hiring in key skill positions such as operations, marketing, human resources and accounting. Both brothers have seen an increase in productivity and professionalism as a result of this approach.

carwash industry, I have picked one job to look at for the sake of clarity. The position selected for the purpose of examining this issue of "hire right" is the manager of an exterior express conveyor carwash.

Research

For the past five years, I have surveyed 103 conveyor carwash managers from 24 carwash organizations of all sizes (1 to 22 locations) all over the U.S. The survey instrument utilized is called a ProScan. After an extensive search, I chose this survey for its accuracy (over 4 million working adults have verified this), the quality of information provided (a 26 page in-depth report), and its ease of use (it takes about 10 minutes to complete it). From this larger number of 103 managers, I identified 21 high-performing exterior express managers.

I chose the following standards to con-

sider a manager a high performer. First, managing (for at least a year) an exterior express carwash that washed over 100,000 cars a year. Second, was successful in training people, using the criteria that at least one or more of the people who reported to them had been promoted to some level of management; i.e., they can train and develop people. Third, less tangible, but very real, was the assessment of the owners that these managers were considered high performers.

What I found was that 16 of the 21 (76 percent) fit a pattern of behavior traits that were very identifiable using the survey instrument. Having a survey that could increase the likelihood of a good match 76 percent of the time is a wonderful tool to have before assessing a person's match to the job (whether promoting from within

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or hiring a manager from outside the business). However, it is important to note that 24 percent of the high performers did not match the metrics in at least one significant area, and they are still high performers. So, behavior traits or the natural ability to do a particular job by itself does not explain entirely why someone is successful.

The other factor that does explain why that 24 percent were successful, even though not a natural fit in some way, is their motivation. Motivation has to be determined with good interviewing skills as well as careful reference and background checks. Also, there is a separate section of the ProScan Survey that addresses motivation. And, even then, no process is 100 percent effective. It is all about increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the selection process. If 10 minutes for a survey can take you from a “hit-or-miss” proposition to a 76 percent rate of success, this is a huge improvement. Now let’s examine exactly what these behavior traits are.

Behavior traits

There are 10 specific measurements contained in a ProScan survey that provide a good picture of the behavioral traits desired for this position. The first areas of measurement are the four cornerstone traits of



Curtis Emmons reviews applicant's survey to determine a match to the Job Model for the Customer Service Attendant position.

Dominance (The Take Charge Trait), Extroversion (The People Trait), Pace (The Patience Trait) and Conformity (The Systems Trait). The fifth area is a person's Unique Trait Pairs, which are created by the combination of a person's four cornerstone traits. After that, information is provided on a person's Logic (the mental processes by which decisions are made), Energy Styles (how tasks are approached or goals are

accomplished), and Kinetic Energy Level (mental, emotional and physical energy). The last area of the survey provides information on an individual's Communication and Leadership Styles. These 10 measurements give us the knowledge of who we truly are: Our basic, natural self.

The measurements in the above areas are then matched up to what is called a Job Model. This model has been created by taking the behavioral traits of those high performers and creating a framework against which a person's behavioral traits can be compared. The question we are looking to answer is whether or not someone has the ability to do the job and do it well. Let's look at just one of these 10 traits to illustrate how this works.

Extroversion

Extroversion is the Social/Relational Trait. It has to do with people and their fluency in communication. People with high extroversion tend to act on their environment (versus reacting to their circumstances) and control their environment through people. Managers with high Extroversion are very articulate communicators, effective delegators and persuade employees to do their work instead of dictating to them.

Managers with very low Extroversion, on

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“Out Quote Please”

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the other hand, are reserved, communicate cautiously, may be selective in whom they place trust and want to think before having to respond to a customer or employee.

Now where do the 76 percent of the high performing managers come out on this measurement? Not low Extroversion, because as an exterior express carwash manager you have to be able to respond quickly and effectively to customers and employees. In fact, 100 percent of the high performing managers were high in Extroversion and in most cases this was their highest intensity trait. However, although most managers were not extremely high in this area like you might want for someone in a sales position, they were what you might term moderately high in Extroversion. They can be described as responsive, participative, friendly and fairly persuasive. They are not verbose, effusive or extremely outgoing like someone in sales.

Taking this trait one step further, it is easy to see why this measurement fits a successful exterior express carwash manager. To deal with customer complaints, for example, it is really helpful if a manager wants to communicate and is comfortable doing so. Handling the customer well is desired as opposed to a manager with low Extroversion who might have the tendency to hand the customer a complaint form and say, “Fill this out and I’ll pass it on to the owner.”

For each of the 10 behavior traits a very precise model now exists that can scientifically measure a manager’s aptitude for the job.

Discoveries

There are several discoveries I have made during the course of this research.

First, the common wisdom for decades in the carwash industry has been that it is very difficult to find a really good conveyor carwash manager. Well, this research confirms that belief statistically. Most of the people that you interview for a management posi-



The Operations Manager now interviews one person from the group interview who matched up to the Job Model.

tion, whether internally or outside the company, will not match up ideally. However, you can change that equation dramatically with the next discovery.

Second, the way to attract candidates who fit the natural behavior traits that you want is by inserting into the advertising certain words that attract the people with those particular traits. This can dramatically increase your percentage of matches.

Third, when promoting from within someone who has been successful as an employee but does not fit the profile that you want ideally for a manager, you still might go ahead and do that for many reasons. What’s different when using a system like this is that now you can predict exactly where that person is going to have a problem performing his or her job. You can then supply them with coaching and training to improve on areas that are not “natural” for them. Remember that there are 24 percent of the successful managers that do not fit the model of carwash management perfectly. It is possible to succeed with someone who is not a perfect fit — it just takes more work on the part of ownership and upper

management. And, that person has to be motivated to master the areas that are not natural to them.

Fourth, and maybe most importantly, when you start using a survey like this in the way we have described, the biggest benefit is that you become a better manager of people. Why? Because when you start getting in touch with how everyone who reports to you is very different in so many ways, you start treating people as the individuals that they are. And, for the person that is being managed, that feels great. That sets in motion a chain of events: Better morale, which leads to higher performance, which in turn creates a more positive environment for the customers. Good people stay, customers come back more often and these are the signs of a great organization. □

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