



The Effective Organization

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We Multi-Task Here

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*"The Northern Lights have seen
strange sights,
But the queerest they ever did see..."*
-- The Cremation of Sam McGee

While they may not quite compare to the sight spoken of by the nameless narrator of Robert Service's famous poem, nonetheless some of the tales I've heard lately of interviews certainly give *Cremation of Sam McGee* a run for its money.

By far the most dramatic was the interviewer who spent the entire interview reading email. When the candidate tried to get the interviewer's attention, the response was, "We multi-task here." The interviewers who ask technical questions and then say, "That's not how I would solve the problem, so you must be wrong," are, sadly, so common that they don't even rate.

I must confess that when I heard the first story, I was left speechless. Here's an interviewer trying to convince a candidate to take a job at a company and is treating that candidate with a total lack of respect. If that's how the person behaves when the candidate isn't working there, how will he behave when the candidate is working there? That's assuming, of course, that the candidate takes the job.

Now, it's highly likely that some people are thinking that there must be a mistake in the previous paragraph: shouldn't it say that the candidate is trying to convince the company to hire them? Sure they are; however, it's a two-way street. The company clearly needs someone to fill a certain position, even if it's not that specific person. Conversely, that person needs a job, even if it's not that specific job.

But wait, it's a terrible economy! Does the candidate really have a choice? Surprising as it may seem, yes they do. If one company is hiring people with a given skill set, odds are others are as well. Companies hire because they believe that the value of bringing someone in exceeds the cost: in other words, they see a potential, or actual, source of revenue. Well, there are a lot of companies out there; if one finds a valuable niche, you can bet others will too. Pretty soon, they'll be competing for the available pool of talent. The best people will go where they are most respected.

Of course, once a company has successfully hired someone, there's the little matter of keeping the person. Economies have a nasty habit of suddenly getting better. People who feel that they

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["We Multi-task Here" was published by ERE.net](#)

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are being badly treated at their current company are the most likely to jump ship when things turn around. The worst time for a company to lose people to the competition is, by a rather amazing coincidence, when business is really starting to ramp up. The company that establishes a huge lead at the start of an economic upswing may not become the dominant player, but that's the way to bet. The company that lags risks being doomed to second-rate status, if it survives at all.

During the last downturn, the CEO of one midsized technology company told several employees that he wouldn't give them raises because, "It's a terrible economy and you have no where else to go." Within a month, each of those people had found new jobs at significantly higher rates of pay. Although the employees were eventually replaced, the cost to the company, in terms of lost productivity and ramp up time for the new people, was huge. Their competitors dethroned them from their once dominant position in their market niche. The company now no longer exists.

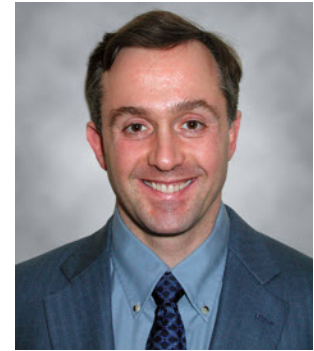
It is, therefore, extremely important to remember that trying to take advantage of a downturn is penny wise and pound foolish. The hiring process is the first glimpse that prospective employees will have of your company and its culture. Right from the start, it's critical to present the right image. That means that:

- As obvious as it may seem, apparently there are interviewers who don't realize that they should give candidates their undivided attention. Would you hire a candidate who spent the interview reading email or IMing?

- The company needs to understand who it's looking for and know how to recognize that person. Bringing candidates back for one round of interviews after another only sends the message that the company doesn't know what it's doing.
- Tests, puzzles, or other problems presented to the candidate to solve must be presented by employees who are capable of understanding answers other than their own. It's not a battle of wits: the goal is to see if the candidate can solve the problem, not if they can read the interviewer's mind. Interviewers who will only hire candidates less skilled than they are doom the company to mediocrity.

If you want the best people, you need to treat them with respect from the very beginning. When it comes to treating people with respect, it's never different this time around.

About 7 Steps Ahead



Stephen R. Balzac is a consultant, professional speaker and president of 7 Steps Ahead, specializing in helping businesses increase revenue and grow their client base.

Steve has over twenty years of experience in the high tech industry and is the former Director of Operations for Silicon Genetics, in Redwood City, CA.

He serves on the boards of the New England Society of Applied Psychology (NESAP) and the Society of Professional Consultants (SPC). Steve is a member of the Operations Committee of the American Judo & Jujitsu Federation. No stranger to the challenges of achieving peak performance under competitive and stressful conditions, he holds a fourth degree black belt in jujitsu and is a former nationally ranked competitive fencer. Steve is an adjunct professor of Industrial/Organizational Psychology and has been a guest lecturer at MIT and WPI.

Building effective development organizations, improving team morale, focus, and enthusiasm, developing effective communications between team members, reducing employee turnover, helping businesses identify and attain strategic targets, and applying sport psychology techniques to business have been some of his most successful projects.

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