

Good Hires

By Chris Burand

I have seen a full range of hiring philosophies in insurance agencies. Some agency owners place great emphasis in various personality tests, especially when hiring producers. At the other end of the spectrum, I have seen agency owners that believe anyone can do the job if they just work hard enough.

Hard work alone though, while obviously important, will not make just anyone a successful salesperson, or an engineer, or an attorney, or a mechanic. People have personalities that make them more likely to succeed in certain endeavors. For example, a math whiz is much more likely to succeed in engineering. This is not to say a person who does not do well in math cannot become a successful engineer, but to become successful, that person will have to work extremely hard, their success will take longer, and they will need more support. In the business world, and especially in insurance agencies, people do not always get the extra time and extra support. So perhaps a combination of hard work and a natural inclination toward the desired field is the best recipe for success.

Even with the right personality and hard work, another key ingredient is very often over-looked. Certain environments can make the difference between success and failure too. Agency owners need to consider not only the candidate's personality, but their own agency's environment and how their environment matches up with the kind of person they are trying to hire. Many agencies do not consider their own environment and this may largely explain why some agencies that have relied on personality tests still have their new hires fail. I have had many agency owners, after several such failures, completely disavow such tests.

However, I have experienced so many producers who failed these tests and failed too as producers that I have to believe these tests have relevance. It is an elimination process where the least likely to succeed are weeded out. The candidates remaining are not guaranteed successes though. Consider Michelangelo's search for the perfect marble for carving David. He inspected a huge number of marble blocks before finding what looked like the perfect one. Yet even then, he still had to carve with care without knowing for sure whether he would find an impure vein inside and have to begin all over.

Discovering whether a candidate has the potential is only one piece of the puzzle. Michelangelo could take a plain marble block and turn it into an incredible masterpiece. These personality tests test for common traits other producers have shown, not what kind of producer will succeed in your hands, in your agency's environment. What can you do with raw talent? Does your environment facilitate nurturing and developing producers or do you have a "throw 'em to the wolves" environment?

I knew a young producer with huge raw talent that went to work in a "throw 'em to the wolves" agency environment. He had moderate success, he did not starve but he did not get fat either. He then went to work at a shop that could carve and mold raw talent and he now writes almost seven figures a year in commissions. He had the personality, and indeed his personality tests

showed the right traits, but his first employer is still probably wondering how someone could show such a strong sales personality and yet only have moderate success at his agency. It is rare that the right personality does not also need the right environment to succeed.

The right personality then is going to vary from one agency to another. What kind of environment does your agency possess? I am not aware of an agency personality test, so this is something an agency has to determine for itself. The following questions might help: "What resources, time, training, and money will the agency honestly offer a new producer?" and "Does your agency sell relationships or product/price?" If the agency is selling relationships but not offering adequate resources, no matter who is hired, the producer is likely to fail. Another consideration is a lot of agencies have environments that cannot handle very successful producers, sometimes known as rainmakers. Ask yourself honestly, "Can I handle a rainmaker? Can my staff handle their demands?"

Personality tests are valuable and I encourage agencies to use them, especially when hiring producers. Think hard first though about what kind of producer is most likely to succeed in your agency.

Chris Burand is president of Burand & Associates, LLC, an insurance agency consulting firm. Readers may contact Chris at (719) 485-3868 or by e-mail at chris@burand-associates.com.

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