

How a Set of Russian Dolls Can Help You Grow an Organization of Giants...

Not shrink to a group of dwarfs

Great companies understand that their teams have a profound impact on their bottom line.

Advertising legend David Ogilvy understood that great businesses cannot be built by downsizing their facilities, nor can they be built by downsizing employees' potential. So he charged every manager with the task of hiring someone better suited and better qualified to the job than they were. This was no easy task, especially when most people have a natural tendency to hire down (call it insecurity or call it job security – it's a human trait and one that is very much alive and well in the workplace). But Ogilvy got it right and in doing so, built one of the most successful agencies in the history of advertising.

Grow Up and Out – Not Down and In

To drive home his point, he gave people a set of Russian dolls when they were appointed to a management role. Instead of charging his team with finding people who could perform the task at hand, Ogilvy challenged his team to find people who could build a great company, challenge each other to think harder and inspire each other to build a company that grows up and out.

"If you always hire people who are smaller than you are, we shall become a company of dwarfs. If you always hire people who are bigger than you are, we shall become giants."

David Ogilvy

Within the Russian dolls that get progressively larger, the manager is positioned as the tiniest of the dolls. Upon his or her shoulders rests the responsibility of helping to build an organization of giants who will continue to grow and push the company (and everyone in it) to greatness. When faced with the alternative (to shrink to a team of dwarfs) the right (and indeed, the only) course of action becomes pretty obvious to even the most insecure or ego-driven employees.

Consider the costs of hiring down the ladder of skill and aptitude. A business is likely to see lost sales, missed opportunities, dissatisfied customers, low employee morale, high employee turnover, wasted time spent on training and orientation as it gets dragged into a perpetual hiring process.

Also consider the outcome of a manager afraid to hire up. A manager surrounded by yes-men ultimately stifles innovation, risk-taking and experimentation. A manager intimidated by an

employee who has greater knowledge or expertise in some facet of the business is likely to constrain that employee's potential for fear of being shown up. This results in countless lost opportunities, not to mention high employee turnover when those unrecognized people seek challenges elsewhere.

Use the dolls in your Team Development strategy

To make the most out of your Team Development strategy, you may want to use Ogilvy's model and hand out Russian dolls to your managers. Remember that in doing so; newly hired team members will get the message that they were hired by a company dedicated to lifelong learning and growing up and out.

Another way to get great results from your Russian dolls is to use them in your new employee induction meetings and in your annual employee reviews.

When setting down your expectations for new recruits make it perfectly clear that your organization subscribes to the lifelong learning philosophy. Let everyone know that every person within the business has a personal responsibility (and will receive the necessary support) to grow his or her skills and ability to contribute by a full doll-size each year.

Hand managers a set of the dolls at the point of hire. Use the dolls to explain the constant growth path you expect all new recruits to embark on and give them something to strive for.

Charge your people with building a team of individuals who are greater than and better at their jobs than their managers. And let the team know they are supported by a group of managers who are striving for that to be the case.

To build a great company, you can't be afraid to hire the best, train the best and demand the best for your customers. This is the terrain of the courageous, not the timid. It is also the terrain of the successful, not the millions of

'also-rans' (think of a race, where you have a winner, a loser and the rest of the pack who 'also-ran'!).

Ogilvy achieved greatness. He was made commander of the British Empire in 1967, elected to the advertising hall of fame in the US in 1977 and received France's Order of the Arts and Letters in 1990.

If you want to build a truly great company, consider Ogilvy's idea and introduce a set of Russian dolls into your organization.

Bear in mind that the highest mountains and the tallest trees got there by being pushed up not by everything around them shrinking.

Support Resources

Our firm is a member of the Principa Alliance, a global network of business growth consultants who are focused on helping small to mid sized business owners build better businesses.

We can help you with the concept of hiring UP in order to grow your business to its fullest potential.

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