

## Greatness and Your Gut

### The Quest for Super Staff Members

If you could assemble the very best team of innovators, producers, motivators and leaders, would you? If you were looking for a place to work, would you seek a company that recruits the best or just recruits—do ya wanna work with slugs or sluggers? (The only upside to working with slugs is that it is easier to look good.)

It all boils down to two things—the quality of the interview *process* and the quality of the decision—for both parties.

Yeah, yeah, blah blah blah—you've heard it all already. But have you made changes in the way you seek employees or employers? Are the changes so difficult? From our POV (that's Point of View), the answers are "no" and "no".

Here's one reason folks don't change what they do when interviewing or being interviewed—nobody expects it. We say raise the bar and the expectations. People aren't comfortable in an interview, no matter which side of the table. People in the interview session are generally showing their best, but perhaps not typical, behavior. Not enough information is learned, so decisions are based on a little chemistry and a prayer. It shouldn't be that way. Heck, most people spend more time investigating the pros and cons of a kitchen appliance than of a new hire. That won't work for companies that hope to soar on the wings of success.

We supply some benchmarks here that make a difference—whether you are the chooser or the choosee.



#### What You Need to Find Out

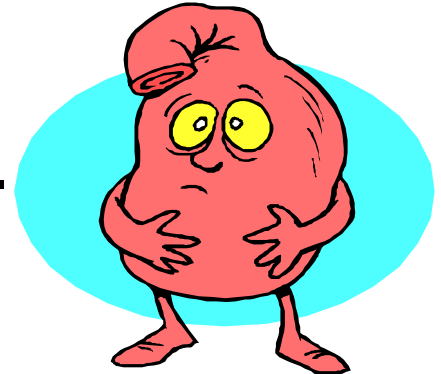
Here are the things we advise you learn about your candidate or future boss:

- **Fit:** Approachability; personality, comfortableness
- **Talents:** Uniqueness, skills, supporters, awards
- **Ghosts:** Who and what lurks in the past that tells the story of his/her style?
- **Integrity:** Honesty; Cuts corners/ takes advantage or does the right thing?
- **Funny Bones:** Humor; pleasure (how does she/he give or appreciate?)
- **Pride:** Work quality; degree of professionalism in self and work products
- **Creativity:** Innovation; approaches to both old and new challenges
- **Confidence:** Collegial or arrogant? Convincing or unsure?
- **Preparedness:** Initiative, planning, forethought
- **Preferences:** Passions and pet peeves
- **Respectability:** Manners, consideration, humility
- **Judgment:** Decisiveness, analytical abilities, perspectives

Most, if not all of these things come to the interview parties through the gut, in the form of instinct. Feelings and impressions roil around as you see and hear your candidate/prospective boss. But many of us don't know how to translate the gut feelings into solid facts.

It is crucial to know if you or your candidate will be a fit in the company. If you feel there are some niggling doubts, it is imperative to dig deeper. Do you really want to saddle yourself with a match that ends up causing the discomfort of a pair of underwear two sizes too small? Even if you are 90% certain it's a fit, it is still worth the extra effort to check it out. It is a lot harder to correct a bad hire than to return those BVDs for another size.

Besides, you don't want to work with some-



one who accepts a 90% effort, do you?

**See our special insert which contains some provocative questions and the thinking behind them.** We have also included some must-dos that should occur before and after the interview. *If you want the whole story, you just can't read the middle chapters of the book.*

Two last points: we all tend to gravitate to those with characteristics like our own. That won't change. But if you need change in your company, make sure the candidate interviews with 3 to 5 different high performers and let the majority rule. If you need some new life in the staff already there, hire people who exude energy, great humanity and high standards. And please don't let any but the most stellar performers make hiring decisions, or you'll get mediocre clones.

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#### In This Issue...

##### Page Two

- *Audience Feedback for Presenters*
- *BIG DESK, Little Cube - The Office Artwork*

##### Page Three

- *Light Touches—Land's End*
- *pArticle Piques—Receipt Reviews*
- *Warm Tips—Funeral of a Friend*

##### Page Four

- *Insider Insights—Great Travel Website; AB 1825 (Sexual Harassment); What We're Up To*
- *Beacon Bits*
- *Last Laughs—Health Care*

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Ever been in a meeting during which a presenter displayed an interminable series of slides while reading every word you could see on the screen? This is but one of the beefs of our constituency: if all that needs to be said is there, please sit down or become a mime. People don't appreciate being read to when they are perfectly capable of reading themselves—unless, of course, it is a bedtime story. Some presentations can be real snoozers, but they won't result in sweet dreams.

So, on behalf of spectators and attendees everywhere, here are some requests—there are more, but these are the biggies:

- 1) If your presentation is going to be viewed by an assemblage, keep the written

- points to a minimum. The speaker's job is to explain what is behind, underneath and around the point. Anecdotes are best for this, since people relate better to real-life, human experience than theory or impersonal facts. 5-7 bullet items per slide (preferably one line apiece) are plenty. The people who care will either ask for the background details or take notes about areas of interest.
- 2) Bar charts and other graphic depictions of trends or findings are great. But they take some time to absorb. Make sure the axis, pie pieces, etc. are clearly defined on the chart, and again, limit the span of information reflected so your audience does not have to discern an entire decade of data in 60 seconds.
- 3) Humor is essential. There is nothing wrong with liberal insertions of car-

toons or quips to make a point. Be careful of copyright issues, and make sure the levity enhances the point.

- 4) If you intend to provide paper copies of your presentation to everyone, save a forest or two and print multiple screens on one page. Leave room for notes. And please number the pages and include the date and your contact information, okay? In case your presentation has a life beyond the trash can just outside of the meeting room, and someone actually wants to refer to it later, this is helpful.
- 5) Maintain continuity in the appearance of your data, so your audience gets comfortable with the format. Make the flow of information sequential. Use the same color schemes and fonts to prevent distraction. The quality of the presentation itself can make or break acceptance of the information you wish to impart.

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## BIG DESK / LITTLE CUBE:

*(a look at the varied perspectives of managers and employees)*

### THE OFFICE ARTWORK

Most large corporations have plenty of artwork around, and plenty of homely stuff to boot. You certainly can't please everyone, and we're willing to concede we never took art appreciation. On the other hand, we bet 98% of the people at your office or plant didn't either.

If you were escorted to your corporate headquarters blindfolded, you'd know your proximity to the prez just by looking at the stuff on or near the walls. The closer to the brass, the more pricey the objects d'art. And even if you aren't a skilled appraiser, there are certain tip offs, such as little plaques bearing the name of the artist be-

low or to the side of the piece. We don't begrudge expensive art, but do wonder why it always ends up where the least amount of people see it. Of course we understand that the trappings of the elite must correspond with their importance. There are clients to impress. But what about the rest of the walls of the floors and warehouses where the work occurs?

Often, these walls are adorned with numbered prints of abstract stuff or blown up photos that just break up the monotony of white paint. In other cases, the display is bizarre enough to earn a few comments or even a pet name by employees. But does it enhance the environment or just take up space?

#### BIG DESK DWELLERS:

You have some say about the environment of your office. Gosh, there is probably some *color* in your room. Since a big part of your job is to be away in meetings and glad-handing functions, why not share it

with the people who make you look good? Chances are that you already have a window, so you get to see real life beyond the company enclosure.

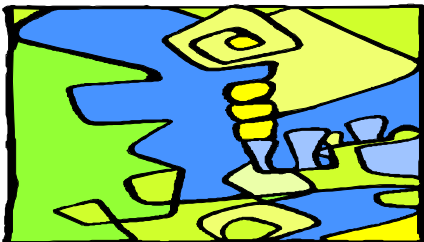
Go take a look at what surrounds the work areas of your firm. Would it make you stop for an appreciating gaze? Do you even know who picked out the artwork and why? Does it do something that is representative of the company and its employees? Has it been in the same place (or dusted) during the past 5 years? Have you noticed how your staff members have chosen to personalize their work areas and is there some correlation to the artwork?

#### Little Cube Inhabitants:

No, it isn't your house. But it is very nice that most of you are allowed to have family photos at your workstation, and a supply of push pins for calendars, certificates or jokes.

Why not suggest dedicating a large wall in your work area where you and your co-workers can post the masterpieces of your children or grandchildren for a week? Rotate the display by season, or theme. Or have a humor wall? We did this at a former employer and found that *everyone* liked it a lot. We bet it will inspire more appreciation than the "art" that is there now.

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# Light Touches

Service Extras That Linger Long After the Experience

## Land's End—a Nice Place to Visit

We are enthusiastic shoppers of Land's End products—the quality is good for the price, the selection is vast, and they hem your pants for free (including cuffs). Custom lengths are really appealing when you have custom-length legs. And get this—they will accept returns of the stuff they customized!

Until recently, though, they were available chiefly through catalogs or online. Not so, now that they have joined the Sears family. You can use your Sears charge to purchase items from them through any of their delivery channels. And, they figured out how to give consumers the best of cyberspace and brick: catalog/online returns can be

taken to any Sears store for a refund, thereby alleviating the expense and hassle of mailing back merchandise.

They have made *buying* easier, too: for those who want to touch and feel before the purchase, Sears has entire sections dedicated to Land's End. And if you do return an online or catalog purchase to the store, it is easy.

Then you get a surprise in the mail—a postcard from Land's End indicating that they received your return and have credited your account. Nice follow-up, we think. Even though we received confirmation of the credit at the time of the onsite return, the extra touch was appreciated.

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## pArticle Piques

Irritating details of service that cost: **Receipt Reviews**

Those people who check your receipt upon exit from the warehouse store, computer store or office supply store have a mission: to make you stand in a judgment line before you reach freedom.

Really, what they are looking for is an error in your receipt that will send you back to line to pay for something that slipped by the checkout person. We have no quarrel with righting a wrong. However, they are just not honest about the reason for doing so.

We wrote or asked companies that employ these so-called Door Nazis why they do this—and were told that the practice has been put into place to ensure we aren't charged for items we didn't buy. We don't know about you, but we tend to notice this kind of thing all by ourselves and address it at the checkout counter.

Our pique arises on several fronts:

- If the procedure exists as purported, why don't they work on methods to improve accuracy by the people doing the scan-

ning?

- If they are really looking for oversights/undercharges, as we suspect, why not implement more dignified preventive measures?
- If theft is the underlying issue, why aren't their store cameras, door sensors and security personnel adequate?
- Why, about half of the time, do people staffing these choke points not even look in the basket/bag to make sure we weren't overcharged for items appearing on the receipt?
- How can these companies claim that service is a priority when the last thing experienced is an assessment of our character at the door?
- We still believe that the preponderance of people are honest—are they saying this is not the case?

We'd love to know if the results are more in the favor of the customer than the store—if they actually catch more overcharges than undercharges. If so, we will gladly wait with our outstretched receipt in hand until they figure out a better approach. If not, we would ask for a little honesty on their end.

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## Warm Tips

*Reheating some old principles to succeed in new times*

### Funeral of a Friend

We just attended the service for a former colleague with whom we spent many lunches, meetings and crises—a long time ago. He was a good man; he really loved his family, was liked by all. He was a real supporter—of us and of several others. He was smart, and he smiled a lot.

On top of the morose nature of the gathering, and after bearing witness to a rather impersonal recitation of his life by the presiding emcee, we found some comfort in being among the company of several folks we once worked with. What we all had in common was our respect and fondness for him; our sorrow for his early and unexpected demise.

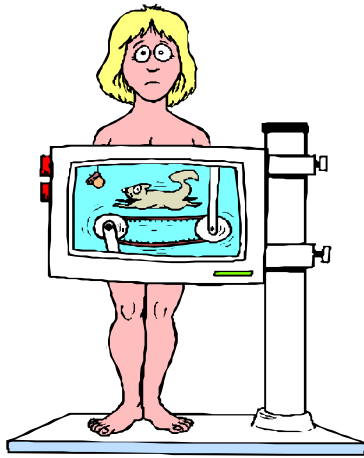
This got us reeling in a load of regret. We wish we had expressed our feelings to him before—while we saw him every day—instead of silently and sadly in a grassy graveyard.

We know it is unreasonable to maintain contact with all former co-workers, even the favorites. Despite good intentions, life moves us from place to place; from face to face. Not all can be in our present, and the past just gets larger every day.

So we suggest, based on this lesson we learned, that we need to make appreciation an agenda item. To regularly take time to share admiration and pleasure as it occurs. We think it will improve people's lives while they are living them. Post-mortem platitudes may offer comfort to the grieving, but don't do much for the guest of honor.

Special people deserve special effort. We intend to let people know how they are special to us. Now.

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**Great Website for Travelers:**

[TripAdvisor.com](http://TripAdvisor.com) goes beyond booking reservations by providing actual consumer reviews of their experiences. We find it incredibly helpful in making hotel arrangements as the information provided by real people goes beyond the standard information supplied by web sponsors. For instance, comments like "didn't mind it was in a seedy part of town" steered us to other choices. Too, information about access to local transportation, onsite restaurant quality, staff service levels and the like painted a clearer picture for our expectations. As a bonus, [TripAdvisor.com](http://TripAdvisor.com) also allows users to compare prices of all the major travel websites, including Orbitz, Expedia, Hotels.com, etc. Check it out before you book.

**AB 1825—Sexual Harassment**

Thanks to our friend Sherrill Johnson, we became aware of a new California bill that

**Insider Insights**  
*Thoughts and News Items We Felt Like Sharing*

requires employers of 50 or more employees (this includes temps and contractors) to supply training to supervisors about sexual harassment: not how to do it, but how to avoid it. Starting in January 2005, such employers are responsible for having proof of a minimum of 2 hours of training, which can be interactive. Training must be complete by 2006. For those of you in California, call us for information on how we can help you achieve compliance. For the rest of the nation and the other lands of our readers, just wait—sooner or later a similar law may be enacted in your area.

**What We're Up To**

- Our Light pArticles newsletter is now circulated in 21 of the United States of America and to four countries.
- We have officially become strategic partners of Zenger-Folkman (aka The Extraordinary Performance Group, Inc.). Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman are the authors of *The Extraordinary Leader* (McGraw-Hill, 2002). We sponsor, distribute and teach their outstanding leadership program, which we have frequently espoused. It was just too good to not be a part of this insightful method of increasing profit, reducing turnover, improving employee engagement and elevating customer satisfaction. See their website—[www.zfco.com](http://www.zfco.com) and stay tuned—we're hosting a conference in the 2nd quarter of next year.

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**Beacon Bits**

Quotations to cast rays of humor and humanity across everyday business life

**Views from humorist Steven Wright:**  
(contributed by Paula Ferrini)

- Half of the people you know are below average.
- A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feel so good.
- All those who believe in psycho-kinesis, raise my hand.
- My mechanic told me, "I couldn't repair your brakes, so I made your horn louder."
- To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; to steal from many is research.
- The sooner you fall behind, the more time you'll have to catch up.
- A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking.

**Last Laughs:**  
Health Insurance

Since annual benefits enrollment is just winding down in many companies, we felt this timely email worthy of sharing:

**Top 7 Indicators that your Employer has Changed to a Cheaper HMO....**

**#7**—Annual mammograms have been

relocated to Hooters.

**#6**—Directions to your doctor's office include "take a left when you enter the trailer park."

**#5**—The tongue depressors taste faintly of Fudgesicles

**#4**—The only item listed under Preventative Care Coverage is "An apple a day."

**#3**—Your primary care physician is wearing the pants you gave to the Goodwill last month.

**#2**—The only expense with 100% coverage is embalming.

**#1**—Your Prozac comes in different colors with little M's on them.

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**Happy Holidays to All!**

Your support and interest are deeply appreciated. We wish you health, peace, freedom and the drive to share your humor, wisdom and kindness with others. As our friend Carolyn Uhl always says, **"Life is Not a Dress Rehearsal"**

