

Wilhide & Company

3019 West 43RD Street
Minneapolis, MN 55410

Happy New Year! Here are some ideas that may help make it more productive.

OBSERVATIONS

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A Journal Of Things We Find Interesting

How To Hire Marketing People

Good marketing people are hard to find. While there always seems to be a glut of applicants, it's a tough job choosing those who can take a marketing group from ordinary to excellent and make a first rate marketing organization. Here are six things I'd look for.

1. **INSTINCT.** Some people have an instinct for marketing, some don't. I can't explain it, but I know it's there. Those who have it learn from training and from experience -- they get better. Those who don't just never quite get it right. They may have other character traits that help them get into decision-making positions but they still don't know jack about marketing. Sales people, for instance, rarely make good marketers. They are too focused on closing the next deal -- on selling the first time -- rather than selling repeatedly to satisfied customers. They don't think long term.

2. **CONFIDENCE AND OPTIMISM.** Good marketing people believe their programs will work. They overcome obstacles. It's like the offense on a football team. The defense is looser, reactive and can do anything to stop you. The offense is more regimented -- everything has to

go right for a play to work. Yet good football offenses believe they can make progress... and win... even when the score and the rules favor the other side.

Marketing is a job where you get beat up. You have to believe in yourself and in marketing to be good at this. When your program works you sometimes get praise, but you always get criticism. Good marketers go into the game looking for ways to make something work, not ways to critique it.

Good marketers are creative, confident, have a strong business sense and an instinct for what marketing is really about.

3. **CREATIVITY** in four specific areas. First, the ability to "image." Good marketing people literally "see" a brochure, an ad or an overall strategy at an early stage. They have a clear mental image of how it's supposed to look. I often sketch out plans for clients using circles and squares -- to help show how things fit together. Same with ads and brochures. The sketches aren't fancy, but they work better than words.

Second, curiosity. Good marketing people know a lot about a lot of things, and are driven to learn more. They want to know everything about the audience and about the product. They don't sit in cubicles and take direction -- they go out and discover things. Bad marketers don't know their product in depth and they don't really understand what drives the decisions of prospective customers.

Third, commitment. Good marketers don't get defeated easily. They can be flexible, especially when situations change, but because they see how things are supposed to turn out they try hard to get there. They tend to work all the way through a plan, not drop it part way.

Fourth, good taste. Especially visually. Good marketers know what looks "right" and sounds right for their audiences and what doesn't. They may not know how to do graphic design or write extraordinary copy, but they know good work when they see it.

4. **BUSINESS SENSE.** Good marketers develop a sense for how marketing fits into overall business operations. They realize that good marketing grows out of

an inspiring mission and a customer-driven business strategy. They become conversant with everything from financial management to production processes and distribution channels. They understand the difference between sales and profit. They become business generalists.

5. **COMPETENCE.** Good marketers write better than their peers and speak persuasively to small and large groups. They go beyond the "messaging" and believe in what they're saying because they want to convert skeptics. They are competent planners. And they know how to manage a budget effectively -- not to save money, but to spend it wisely.

Good marketers also have specific competencies. They know how to negotiate arrangements with agencies and freelance support, for instance, and they grasp at least some of the details of print and electronic media production. They are good project managers. The best ones master that most difficult of tasks: how not to screw up a good idea.

6. Finally, good marketers have **LEADERSHIP SKILLS.** They can manage groups of people on a day-to-day basis both inside and outside their organizations. They have a driving sense of purpose that people will buy into. They know how to support their teams and get (and protect) budgets. They know how to form alliances and work within them. All marketers may not come into the field with these skills, but they are open to developing them -- they respond well to training, mentors and experience.

There are other important traits -- intelligence, humor, a strong ethical sense -- but if you're in the market for marketing talent keep these six in mind. Ask about them when you check references. Look for them when you interview. I think they'll help you find what you need more reliably than traditional markers: academic credentials, job titles or past experience.

Observations is an occasional publication we put out when we feel like it. We provide creative services and consulting for marketing communications. If you have a project we could help with, please contact us. If you'd just like to shoot the breeze about some of this stuff, we usually have time for that too.

Doug and Jean Wilhide

Bits and Pieces

Words matter, and how we use them (or create them) helps define us. "Executive skills" is a term much repeated in healthcare circles these days, especially in relation to dementia and Alzheimer's. One of the effects of these diseases is that people lose the ability set goals, make plans and implement those plans -- their "executive" functions. They also don't remember names, experiences, or even how to get dressed, but this loss of executive skills is especially frustrating.

Parents of teenagers will note similar executive skills issues, as will social workers and managers of diverse work groups. Our educational system spends very little time on this area, but maybe that should change. It might not help with dementia, but it could help resolve some of the other barriers that keep us from realizing our potential.

How are your "executive skills?"
What do you think of our "post-factual" society? Is the secret to effective leadership hidden in game instructions?

The "post-factual society" is a phrase being used to refer to Americans' willingness to subordinate facts to beliefs. Whether it's the war in Iraq (mission accomplished?), a social security "crisis," deficit spending or global warming, the facts get ignored if they conflict with a political or religious agenda. One in four voters in the last election said they had been "born again," including both the president and a key World Series pitcher.

I wonder what the founding fathers would think of this post-factualism, steeped as they were in Enlightenment philosophies and classical training in logic and scientific reasoning. We seem to be moving from a democracy of, by and for a reasoning people to a society guided by "faith-based" "belief systems."

We received a "racer engine" toy for Christmas. It's a track with race cars that zip around curves and loops, powered by hand-held controllers. The operating instructions include this significant piece of advice: "Considerable skill can be developed in the fascinating study of where to shut off and re-apply power."

An excellent PBS series called "They Made America" tells the stories of some of the country's classic marketing triumphs. In the mid-1950s, the **Mattel company** faced a do-or-die challenge. It had had some success inventing and promoting toys, but not recently. The founders decided to risk everything -- literally bet the business -- on a new, untested medium: TV. Mattel committed \$500,000 to sponsor the **Mickey Mouse Club** show during the fall season. The featured product was a "burp gun" that resembled and sounded like a machine gun.

A week before Christmas they had sold out. Only two guns remained at the factory and they were both broken. This success set the stage for Mattel's next marketing initiative. Against the advice of focus groups and professionals, and a negative reaction at trade shows, the founders introduced a doll with breasts -- **Barbie**. It became the biggest selling toy of all time. Even today two Barbie dolls are sold every second, more than 7000 a day.

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