

I just finished re-reading the book “TRACTION” by Gino Wickman. I first read this book about 6 years ago, and now during the 2nd reading, I am getting just as much out of it as I did six years ago..

One section in TRACTION that directly addresses the power of a business having a VALUES driven culture is a section titled, “RIGHT PEOPLE”. The quote that rang precisely true in my experience is *“It’s important to note that whatever your core values are, they don’t make the people who don’t possess them right or wrong, nor do they make them good or bad. They just don’t fit in your company culture”*

While most business leaders know that you should always hire people who fit the culture and buy into the company VALUES, as a leader it is sometimes tempting to believe that you can, over time and with coaching, influence a “cracker jack” candidate to share the VALUES that are core to your company. In my experiences, including the one that I will share, this rarely happens! As ancient wisdom reflects, “A leopard can’t change its spots”.

The person that I hired a while ago came with a good reference from a big, good company. This candidate's former direct boss told me over the phone that she was a *“very hard worker with a lot of talent”*. That statement also proved true during the written assessment phase of our interview process as she scored off the chart! Never have I since or up to that point seen such a high score! I mean she scored off the chart in all of the right categories!

This talented, hard working, off the chart smart employee started off exactly as advertised and I, being a leader that loves complimenting outstanding performance, began piling on the praise! I praised her talent and work effort to her personally and during weekly company wide team meetings. She was truly a superstar in a critical role for a very important aspect of our business and I felt like I had hit the jackpot for not only this particular role but with someone who could quickly take on more responsibility.

However, it was difficult for me to ignore one glaring issue that she displayed that was in direct opposition to our company VALUES. I talked to her about it several times in “1 to 1” coaching sessions and it was reinforced every week when we took a “deep dive” into our VALUES during our company wide meeting. Other members of the leadership team as well as the other team members undoubtedly noticed this flaw, but only one or two leaders dared to bring it to my attention, and they were very timid in doing so. Everyone saw the value this employee’s hard work and talent were bringing to the company and no one wanted to make a “big deal” out of this VALUES issue that surrounded this key employee. She was making a big impact on the company in a very crucial role so, why focus on the negative?

However, we (This company) had a VALUES driven culture. When one team member, no matter how good, does not fit the VALUES, the culture and the team as a whole suffers, often in subtle ways that overtime become explicit. This VALUES misalignment eventually came to a head and I fired this very talented, very hard working, very dedicated employee, for not following our company VALUES.

I remember that day that I told her she was no longer employed. She was as angry as anyone that I have ever had to part ways with. She stomped out of my office with a red faced glare, turned around on her way out the door and said, "you just fired the best employee you will ever have". I responded, "I may have just lost one of the most talented and hardest working employees that I will ever have, but you don't fit our VALUES". And, that is exactly how I felt!

The loss of this key employee was a relief to many team members including myself. Business continued to grow without any major issues and we soon found another very smart, very hard working and very dedicated team member as a replacement for the one we lost. However, this new team member, in this very mission critical role, was also fully in-line and on-board with the company VALUES!