

Getting the **RIGHT PEOPLE** on the Bus and in the **RIGHT SEATS**

The Beryl Companies' CEO tells how he builds his top management team.

BY PAUL SPIEGELMAN

“If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we’ll figure out how to take it someplace great.”

Jim Collins’ insightful words from *Good to Great* seem so simple, yet too many companies determine direction first and then try to fill staff positions.

Collins’ perspective has helped me reorganize my management approach and focus first on recruiting the right people because then, and only then, can we figure out where we’re headed and how we’re going to get there.

The process of evaluating talent, assembling a leadership team, and maximizing everyone’s potential for contribution involved tough decisions; but the benefits to the company and the members of the leadership team have proven immeasurable.

Here are seven steps that have helped me to get the right people on the bus:

1. Evaluate existing team. Assembling the right management team sometimes can seem like an elusive moving target; but with the right strategy and processes in place, it is possible to “fill the bus” with exactly what a company needs to move to the next level. When faced with this challenge, the logical first step is to evaluate the existing team to determine what is working and what is missing. When I first did this, two things stood out:

- ▶ While it may sound good in theory, promoting from within was not always the most effective way to build a dynamic management team with the required skill set. It is necessary to think broader than simply the resources and talent you have before you.
- ▶ It is crucial to hire people who have more expertise than you do.

(over)

Never put the process on “auto-pilot” and automatically fill a vacated position just because it exists.

2. Hire for skill, not potential. For a company to grow, it must be willing to recruit leadership talent that doesn't already exist within its ranks. Most small to mid-size companies usually do not have the resources required to train and mentor people who have “potential.” Often, they need to hire professionals who have already done before what they need done now.

Recognizing existing talent among employees and providing them with the opportunity to grow are important factors in employee retention, but these individuals may or may not be what the company needs to fill its senior-level positions. It comes down to measuring risk: if an individual has already demonstrated proficiency at another employer, your risk goes down if you hire him or her to do that same or a similar job for you.

3. Remove multiple hats. In addition to hiring for skill, we began looking at the multitude of hats that some of our team members were wearing. It became clear that it was no longer good enough for an important function to be a *part* of someone's job.

Often, an important role *should* be someone's job. In doing so, we elevate the level of importance of some functions by separating them from the mix.

The dissection of some of our leaders' responsibilities also presented us with the opportunity to maximize individual talent and interests. Now, when a team member expresses a fervent interest in and proclivity toward some aspect of our business, I try to determine if there is merit to warrant a new position created around that desire. We have benefited greatly from people who have come forward, told us what they really want to do, and ended up pursuing their passion.

4. Reevaluate openings. Each time a member of the leadership leaves the company, I reevaluate the position. Do the responsibilities need to be redefined? Should the position be elevated to a higher level or reduced to a lower one? Perhaps it needs to be eliminated altogether. Positions should change as the needs of the company change. The qualities that each individual brings to a position give it life. Never put the process on “auto-pilot” and automatically fill a vacated position just because it exists. Make sure that it still fits with the direction the company is headed.

5. Develop position contracts. In Michael Gerber's book, *The E-Myth Revisited*, he advises companies to use position contracts. These are not job descriptions or employment contracts found for years in human resources departments.

Gerber defines a position contract as a “summary of the results to be achieved by each position in the company.” I like to take it a step further and include the values and personal attributes that each person needs to exhibit. It is very useful at higher levels in the company to ensure that leaders support the values we have worked so diligently to create.

6. Hire tough, manage easy. The time, effort, and expense of adding someone at the senior level requires great diligence to ensure that the right person joins the team. Simply having the skills to do a job isn't enough. It is equally important for a manager to connect with and be trusted by peers, which is why our rigorous hiring process involves multiple interviews, including human resources, peers, and subordinates. We also use personality assessments to determine how well a candidate will align with others on the team and align with our company's values and culture.

The decision to hire a particular person requires a substantial level of approval from all involved. This team-recruiting effort increases the likelihood that a new hire is the right “fit” and boosts buy-in from all levels.

7. Know when to let go. Sometimes, you may find that there's someone who really doesn't belong on the bus or is sitting (often uncomfortably) in the wrong seat. Share your concerns directly with the individual. Ask others to communicate directly with that person, too. This allows the manager to self-evaluate and, if necessary, make the needed changes himself or herself. Ultimately, though, you must listen to your instincts; they're usually right.

Recruiting and retaining the right people for your leadership team is about more than propelling your company to the next level. It is about inviting healthy, stimulating debate among professionals all focused on a common goal. It is about opening a universe of new ideas and concepts and being willing to embrace the ones that make sense. And it's about spending your days and passions with people you trust, enjoy and respect. Once you have the right people, great ideas for where to take the company will flow freely.

Paul Spiegelman is founder and CEO of The Beryl Companies, the nation's leading healthcare-exclusive customer interaction center. In 2007, he released his first book, “Why Is Everyone Smiling? The Secret Behind Passion, Productivity and Profit.” Beryl recently was honored as the #2 Best Medium-Sized Company to Work for in America by the Society for Human Resource Management and was named as one of the Inc. 5,000 Fastest Growing Companies in America. To find out more about Beryl, visit www.beryl.net.