

Recruiting, Training and Retaining GIFTS



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State of the Market

- Huge WW competition for talent
- Any CS degree has a job
- Rapid churn in employees
- Big players with bottomless pockets for top performers
- Spoiled kids who know their value
- A sea of floating mediocrity
- Poor work-ethic and shipping discipline (Educated idiot syndrome)

Who are you really recruiting and retaining?

RULE 1: You don't recruit and retain male engineers you recruit and retain Wives and Girlfriends

- If the wife or GF is unhappy the engineer is gone
- If the relationship breaks down the engineer is gone
- The paycheck goes to HER
- Why does SHE want her husband or BF to work for you?

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Coding is NEVER work, it's a calling

RULE 2: Coding is NOT WORK

- People who think it is... aren't real software engineers
- Real engineers want a team and a mission that requires long hours and sacrifice.
- Real engineers want to live in "the zone"
- Real engineers want to be accomplishing great things through technology
- Real engineers don't burn out until their wives or GF's do.
- Real engineers want to be constantly challenged

High expectations, long hours, new challenges and a customer/market driven mission are motivating for real engineers.

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The Artificial Deadline

RULE 3: Software is abstract and impersonal, engineers are motivated by tangible goals

- You ship happy customers not software
- You are accountable to customers not dates or requirements
- Use your customers and your market to help you ship great software and reward your engineers for their MARKET achievements

*How DirectX got shipped

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Incentives

Real engineers don't value money, they value their relationships and their achievements

- The unexpected bonus
 - The money is for the wife or GF, they don't "feel" income. Consistent income is taken for granted, they feel "Change in income". Bursts of unexpected bonuses for achievement and long hours work well while controlling overall compensation costs.
 - The "key-man bonus". Privately offer your leaders achievement bonuses for the success of a project, everyone else will FOLLOW their lead.
- GIANTS can be worth 10X-20X ordinary engineers... are they compensated like it?
 - Stock Option Programs
 - Bonus Programs
 - Potential money is worth more than actual money. Progressive retention programs

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Incentives

The customer, peer or executive review

- What do you do to make them feel that their work and contributions are important/relevant/noticed?

Team Mobility

- Engineers want to change jobs for new challenges, to learn new skills or to dress their resume's.
- Organizations composed of specialists are fragile. Cross-training people and keeping internal mobility high makes the organization more resilient to churn and less likely to experience unmanaged churn.

Managed Churn

People are going to move on, be in control of the terms and timing of their departure.

- Have employee reviews consistently under scheduled conditions. Doing this “synchronizes” departures around circumstances favorable to the business.
- Make sure your people know the definition of “departure on good terms”
 - Between projects, NOT in the middle of a project
 - With plenty of heads-up to their manager
 - With a smooth handoff to a successor
 - On positive terms with no negative influence to co-workers
 - After 3+ productive years at the company
 - Reward “Departure on good terms”

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The Young the Old and the Useless

- Nothing beats youth for speed and innovation
 - Hire for passion, persistence and IQ. (grades, experience, etc. who cares, people with passion, persistence and IQ will learn)
 - Work them “too hard” it’s good for them and the only way they get seasoned
 - Get them as interns while early in college if possible
 - No entrenched bad habits, haven’t learned wage-slave mentality yet, don’t need to be un-taught...
 - 5 kids/old mentor engineer is about right
 - Be on the look out for the holy-grail... the undiscovered Asperger's engineer. (usually found on open source forums)
 - They have no social skills
 - They generally marry the first girl they date
 - Can’t make eye contact
 - Resume and educational background is a mess... because they have no social skills
 - They work like machines, don’t engage in politics, don’t develop attitudes and never change jobs

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The Old Goats

Seasoned veteran's, married, 9 kids, severely battle scarred, seen and done it all... need balance in their dotage

- The good ones are often deeply entrenched in big organizations where they are very well paid and difficult to pry out. They're too "comfortable" to recruit, or they can afford to do whatever they like.
- Can't be recruited with money... can be recruited with a lifestyle change... and a challenge
- Make great mentors for kids
- Offset the expense of hiring them by hiring a lot of junior engineers to work for them

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The Useless

Wage slaves... Hate em!

- Sandwiched between the young and untainted and the grizzled war veterans is a vast sea of The MEDIOCRE. Mediocrity comes in all shapes and sizes but the most troublesome form is from people who have ACCEPTED it.
 - They know their market value and perform exactly to it and no more
 - They are opportunistic about dressing their resumes or getting a 5% raise by job hopping
 - “Balance” is their priority in life... they see their job as WORK that they need to do in order to pay their bills and pursue the interests that they are ACTUALLY passionate about
 - They are generally specialists who have stopped learning. They have entrenched habits and attitudes that can't be changed.
 - They can cost more to have on a team than the incompetent because it's often more work to fire them than it is to manage around them and they are proficient at lingering near the boundary of productivity.

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The “Educated Idiot”

A great number of kids have grown up having never had a menial job, had to earn and/or sacrifice for something they wanted, played a team sport, or faced adversity they’ve overcome. They enter the work force with spoon fed educations, prestigious degrees, an inflated sense of their own value and a disastrous work-ethic.

These kids are characterized by;

- A tendency rationalize their first failures as victimization
- Give up and quit easily
- Quick to adopt “wage-slave” habits
- Develop sour attitudes towards their job and employers
- Difficult to mentor or challenge
- Inability to focus or finish

These kids are often highly sought after and snatched up by traditional employers right out of college... you don’t want them... Look elsewhere for the self starters that have struggled to overcome adversity and lack of opportunity, they are much more valuable and loyal if you can find them.

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The NOT male engineers...

1. Technical women are often quickly promoted for a variety of reasons
 - Stronger social skills make them better managers
 - Better communication skills often make them better architects, technical writers, QA, or technical support people
2. There may actually be more female engineers but nobody can identify them...



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Words of advice

- Invest in the young and driven and the seasoned and wise
- Churn and burn to find an “optimal” team
- Avoid Wage-Slaves and Educated Idiots if you can identify them
- Have the discipline to push out the mediocre, it’s nearly impossible to fix an organization where they have become entrenched
- Don’t waste time managing the weak, you can’t help them
- Recruit and retain the wife or GF
- Non-aspergers technical women are often your best managers and producers
- Don’t promote great nerds unless they really demand it or warrant it, just compensate your top performers in proportion to their value. They often make better mentors than managers.
- Long hours and overcoming hardship together binds teams

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