



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

Hiring For Entrepreneurial Success: Avoiding The Corporate Mindset Trap

Shannon Waller: Are you looking for great entrepreneurial team members? Be mindful of people's backgrounds because it does make a difference. Do they have an entrepreneurial background or a corporate one? Stay tuned to learn more.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, I'm going to talk about something that could be a little bit controversial, and that is really being careful with who you hire and the type of background that they have. In fact, I kind of want to caution you to beware of hiring people with a corporate background. Now, that's a pretty broad statement, and I'm not meaning to paint everyone with the same brush. However, I have had a lot of experience, as have some of my clients, and this is why it's come up lately, who have attempted to hire someone from a corporate environment into their entrepreneurial company, and, well, let me just put it this way, it has not gone well. And so let's talk about what exactly we're talking about and why this is so critical.

So what is a corporate hire? Well, a corporate hire is someone who is very familiar with a larger structure, with really defined accountabilities. They're often used to having a team, which is really interesting, because when you plunk them into a role, they're like, where are all my direct reports? You're like, here's your one or two people. Here's an intern. Or no, you have to do all yourself. And they're like, what? Because they're used to working through other people. Now, if you are really big in corporate, this might be perfect. However, there's a different mindset, there's a different mentality that is really endemic, I guess. How you are successful in a corporation is very different than how you're successful in an entrepreneurial organization.

I write about this a lot in *Team Success*. The whole introduction is really all about the differences between the two different systems. The challenge is, the language of business is the same in both. However, the meanings are completely different. So being responsible for something in a corporate environment means you have a whole team, and you can often work pretty autonomously within your own corporate jurisdiction. But in an entrepreneurial company, it means that you might be producing that result yourself and/or you must work with the whole team in order to make sure that what you're doing is integrated with the bigger picture.

There's kind of an interesting balance between lots of autonomy to do things your way and working in high levels of teamwork that I don't always see as true in corporate structures. Again, I'm making a blanket statement, which I'm sure has exceptions. So I totally appreciate that too. Now, let's go to some examples that I've heard. And again, this comes out of some coaching conversations I've been having with someone who wanted to hire a really high-level position, not inexpensive, paying top dollar. And the person that they were looking at, the first questions in the interview were, how much am I getting paid? And the first questions that the person brought up in the interview were, how much am I getting paid? How much time off do I have? How big is my team and where's my office? In other words, is it a corner office? And I was like, all my little alarm bells are going off because what I see, and again, there are



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exceptions, but not enough, is that people in that structure, they get rewarded on status. It's kind of like you ink and how can you climb the corporate ladder?

In an entrepreneurial company, you get status as a byproduct of your contribution. So when you're in that hiring process, there are a couple things that I want you to do. One is, is the person talking about the contribution that they're going to make to your company? Is that what they're focused on? Or are they focused on their status? Is their title really important to them? I should have said that earlier. You know, "What's my title?" is kind of a thing. Now, in an entrepreneurial company, first of all, I hate corporate titles. Yes, that's a strong word, but I mean it. I detest corporate titles. You know, someone who wants a C-suite title, it might be useful for negotiating in certain circumstances, but really just means you're going to get a lot of really bad mail and something cluttering up your inbox and your LinkedIn. No, thank you. It is not about producing results.

You know, I much prefer Unique Ability titles, ones that really demonstrate, you know, the value that this person is creating. I'm all about Unique Ability titles, not very interested in that, especially for a smaller company with C-suite titles. Really? Really? You know, I know who you're trying to attract, but truly you're not going to attract the right type of mindset. If that's what someone's about, you're probably not going to be able to keep them happy for very long. So why are you doing it?

So that whole thing of who do you hire? So a couple of suggestions. One is, when you are looking at who you're hiring, and this could almost be for any role, not just a leadership role, is ask the person, "Do you have an entrepreneurial background?" Were their parents entrepreneurial? Were you entrepreneurial as a kid? Did you have a paper route? My sister and I had a house cleaning business. Yes, Julia, some of you know her. By the way, I wasn't very good. I'm sure Julia was much better. I'm not saying we were particularly good at it. This is how we made money after school. I remember having to get called back one time because I didn't do a good enough job. Now I delegate this, and I have my own house cleaner. Thank you very much. But at least I made the attempt. My mom's friends, you know, were happy to have two students that they could hire very cheaply. So there you go.

So what's that person's entrepreneurial background? Or, and this is something else I found that does work, and this is kind of a survey of all my entrepreneurial team leaders and The Strategic Coach Team Leader Program. I ask often, "How many of you worked for a large corporation? Did you like it?" And they're like, "No, I hated it." You're like, "Great. You are a good person for an entrepreneurial company." So if they were in a corporate structure but felt squished, like they couldn't be innovative enough, they could not keep growing—and this is true of other entrepreneurial team members I've talked to as well—they plateau way too quickly.



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They're too smart for the structure. And the interesting thing about a corporate—ones I know—corporate structure and environment is that they want you to be excellent. Corporations have high standards. I'm all for that. And there's some really intelligent, great people in corporations. So I'm not trying to bash that. I'm just saying they're not a great fit for your entrepreneurial company. Because if you're super innovative and unique, they kind of flick you off like a fly, like a bug, because you are bugging them. You're going to be the one that keeps coming in with, "Hey, we should try this. Hey, I found a way to be more efficient." They're like, that's not how we do things here. And you're like, oh, seriously?

If someone doesn't like the corporate structure or feels squished, then they actually could be a great candidate for your company. Is it a guarantee? No. But it is one of those factors and ones that people don't appreciate or talk about much that I actually find really, really, really makes a difference. So, have they had an entrepreneurial background themselves? Did they come from an entrepreneurial family? Did they choose to work for small businesses as they were coming up through their career? Or, if they did go work for a large company, how'd they feel about it? Did they like it or did they not like it? Because the people who really didn't like it, the ones I've talked to, which are many in my, as I said, my Team Leader Program, they're like, "Oh, finally some oxygen. I could breathe in this company." You know, "I'm not being micromanaged. I have freedom to do things the way that makes the most sense for me. I can bring in new people. I can find new resources. We can change quickly."

Speed is a big thing. Again, corporations are successful because they don't change things that quickly. You'll be going against the grain if you do. This is just one of those little parts of the secret sauce that I think people need to know because there is such a different mindset that goes with being part of an entrepreneurial company. So again, who are you hiring? Look for commonalities between your background and the people you're hiring, and make sure that the people hiring truly are some of your best entrepreneurial leaders. If not, they'll be hiring people who will make them look good—again, that's a corporate thing—not just who are actually going to benefit the company. It takes some wherewithal to hire someone who's very different than you from a striving standpoint, from personality standpoint, from a Kolbe standpoint. So, you know, your hiring person needs to appreciate that we need a diversity of how people do things, not to just hire clones of them to make them look good.

So, yeah, make sure they're entrepreneurial. Make sure that they're some of your best people who are hiring people who will help you grow, help them grow, and do things differently than how they're already being done. That's not a corporate mentality, just saying, at least not in my experience. So, who are you hiring? What's their background? What are their first questions in an interview? Are they talking about contribution or status? Are they asking about their title, the corner office, if there is such a thing anymore? What are they worried about? What are they excited about? And if they're excited about helping you grow and being part of that growth, have the next interview. But if they're not, I want alarm bells to go off in your head too. I want



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those to be red flags, things that will go, hmm, looks good on paper, but I'm getting a little worried here that they don't have the right mindset, the right attitude, the right approach to the business, because they're going to have to operate independently. They're going to have to dig in, roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty, all those ways of talking about things, and not just, you know, do things for other people and hope it all works, and then they can report the numbers and look good.

It's not how it works in an entrepreneurial business. They have to get in there and really get to know things. And so, you want people who are eager to do that, who want to dive in, and who want to make an impact. That is who you're looking to hire. So, I hope this has expanded your thinking in terms of how to find the right-fit people because hiring is hard. It's not always fun. Sometimes, it can feel like you're looking for a needle in a haystack. But you're a great company, you've got a great culture, and there's a lot of room and opportunity for people who want to contribute. So, make sure you broadcast that loud and clear and then go and attract the people who are actually looking for you. They're feeling squished. They don't know that their entrepreneurial background is, in fact, appreciated. Put that in your advertising. Let people know that you want people with that kind of a background because here is where they're able to thrive. And then I think you'll find exactly who you're looking for.

Thanks so much for listening. I hope this inspired your thinking. Any questions or comments, please let us know at questions@strategiccoach.com. And as always, here's to your team success.