

# Business Tips

## 5 Hiring Mantras Part I of 5

Hiring is on my mind and it is likely on your too, being the time of year it is. From about 1998 to 2000, during the traditional Thursday evening reception that occurs at every BOOT CAMP, I repeatedly expressed that my greatest frustration was that I had learned to hire great people but my Department Leaders didn't seem to have the 'Knack', as I occasionally would meet a new employee and think "how on earth did that person get hired"? So, I decided to follow my own oft-repeated advice -- "If you are banging your head against the wall and it hurts, STOP IT" -- and do something different (pretty simple concept isn't it?). Our Management Team implemented many actions including our level 1, 2, 3 Staff Training Program. However, the most important thing we did was also by far the simplest: to make our 5 Hiring Mantras a central focus of our company, one of our 28 points. What a difference this has made! I still do all Level II Trainings and I have been uniformly impressed with our new hires and only once in the last five years have I strongly doubted a Department Leader's hiring decision (and yes, this person did prove to be a poor fit, so my antenna remains well-tuned).

**Hiring Mantra #1 is "Hire the Character, Train the Skill."** This Mantra is the first because it is fundamental to all that follow. In fact for years this Mantra was our organization's one and only Mantra. Clearly, this Mantra must be taken in context. For instance, this Mantra could perhaps be interpreted literally if one is looking to fill a preschool gymnastics teacher's position. However, if filling a Level 10 coaching position, hiring a person with zero gymnastics experience may not be a first rate idea. What this Mantra is meant to do is to discipline the decision - maker to remember that character must ALWAYS remain top priority - NEVER can knowledge be allowed to take precedence. What often happens is this -- in the real world, when hiring for a highly technical job where skill is clearly important, decision-maker often become so focused on the technical requirements that they forget, ignore or are willing to overlook clear and obvious character flaws that will ultimately be destructive for the organization.

**Beware:** a decision-maker can make to 'hire the character' but fall down badly if a precise definition of character is lacking. At Kids First, character is defined by our 28 Points. In other words, Respectfulness and Trustworthiness are great starting points but there are 26 more to go!

Bottom line is, no matter how much knowledge and skill a prospective employee may have, if that person is lacking in the 28 Points, we gracefully allow that person to become hired by another organization. Case in point -- two yeas ago, while experiencing a grave compulsory coach shortage, we passed up three proven coaches, all of whom were accepted at nearby clubs. In other words, we were willing to suffer minor pain now to avoid major pain down the road. (If you guessed that this statement is foreshadowing of Hiring Mantra #2, you are absolutely correct!)

Have a great month!

**Jeff Metzger**  
**USA Gymnastics Business Development Partner**  
**President, GymClub Owners Boot Camp**  
**President, Kids First Sports Center**