

Who Are the Right People for Your Bus?

Getting the right people on the bus is the most important factor in making a good company great. Who are the "right" people for *your* bus? Tammy Erickson, a McKinsey award-winning author, gives a straightforward answer: the right people are the ones who are *predisposed* to like what you *realistically* and *consistently* offer. She defines these attributes as follows:

- **Predisposed** — People care deeply about different aspects of the work experience — individuals are predisposed to enjoy some work experiences more than others. For example, for some of us, it's essential that the work we do have broader meaning or lasting impact, others crave security and predictability, or teamwork and fun. Some of us are adrenaline junkies — not happy unless we're working against a deadline or facing a do-or-die challenge — while others have complicated lives outside work, to the extent that flexibility in the workplace becomes the highest priority. While most of us care a bit about several of these things, most of us have a strong affinity for one and care little — or even dislike — others.
- **Realistically** — A work environment can't realistically excel in every dimension. Some are more stable and predictable than others could ever hope to be. In fact, some embed stability into their underlying talent management practices. Others are by nature a high-risk, adrenaline-packed experience. Jeff Sonnenfeld, now a professor at Yale, described firms with a "baseball culture" — ones in which your ability to be here tomorrow depends on your statistics today. In these environments, minute-to-minute performance is critical and any sense of long-term security stems only from confidence in your own abilities. Some firms have more of a "family-feel," others revel in fun; some operating models embed team-based work; others are highly flexible.
- **Consistently** — Over time, for various reasons — some external, some internal — the work environments within a company may change. Industry pressures may make it impossible to offer the same degree of long-term career security that was a hallmark of decades past. New management may decide to change a family-oriented culture, placing high value on short-term performance. Shifting customer requirements may necessitate more teamwork among employees, forcing a shift from individually based performance metrics.

Erickson believes that none of these attributes are inherently good or bad, better or worse in terms of creating successful companies. There are examples of very successful companies that excel in every dimension. The key is the fit between what your work environment is like today and will be like in the near future, and what the people who are on your bus care about. People who find working in your organization satisfying and emotionally rewarding are those who are most likely to be committed and engaged. They are the ones who are most likely to invest discretionary effort in ensuring the success of the business.