

WHY GROWING COMPANIES NEED VERSATILE EMPLOYEES

There is a seismic shift going on in successful companies today. Speed has taken on a new meaning. The expectations of our clients and prospects have accelerated at a dizzying pace. Consumers are demanding more choices. New competitors are coming out of nowhere. Others have disappeared. Our companies have become flatter. We are working harder. Hopefully smarter. But what are the lessons?

Bill Engler, President of Diesel Power Equipment Company, an engine and generator distributorship in Omaha, Nebraska, shares his philosophy. "It might sound a bit ironic, but new employees are of limited value to our company if they cannot grow out of the role for which they were initially hired. We hire individuals with the idea that we will want to promote them." And versatility is one of the primary qualities he looks for in the hiring process. "Being versatile is the surest way to get yourself noticed. Even if you are in an entry-level position, demonstrating versatility will go a long way toward having management think about you when new possibilities arise."

On the other hand, Engler points out, "There are people who are so focused that all they want to do is their job 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They are dedicated, certainly. But they are limited. And, in the end, we might not know how they can help us-or we can help them-if the economy changes and we have to change our company's focus to respond."

He explains, "We found ourselves in such a position when we had to sell two components of our business-the heavy and light construction divisions-and focus on the engine division, which we know better. In essence, we had to let about fifty percent of our people go, which made for many extremely difficult decisions. We had to determine who, with the right

training, could move into our expanded engine division. And when push came to shove, our decision was based on who we felt was versatile enough to benefit from training." When the game changes, you need employees who are flexible enough to change with it.

WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE WHEN WE REHIRING SOMEONE. CAN THE INDIVIDUAL GROW WITH US? THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHETHER SOMEONE CAN JUST DO THE JOB TODAY.

Caliper has found that there are really four core attributes shared by versatile employees: they are bright, flexible, competent and confident.

Let's take a minute to explore those four attributes and how they, together, add up to the key quality that employers are seeking today.

First off, when we say bright, we are really referring to someone's problem-solving ability. Are they able to look at complex problems and see patterns that can lead to

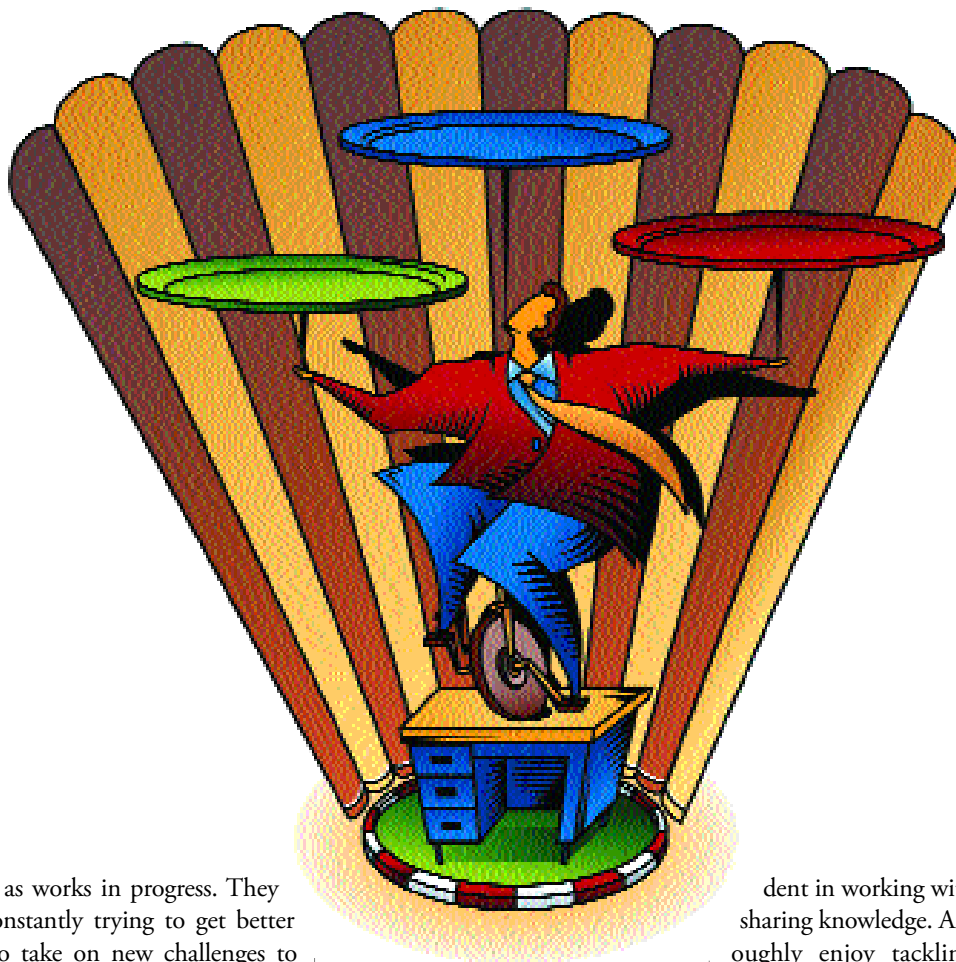
solutions? Are they genuinely interested in learning? In finding out new things?

In a recent Caliper survey of more than 1,000 companies in virtually every industry, the ability to solve problems was overwhelmingly defined as the number-one quality employers were looking for in new employees-and the most difficult to find. This certainly underscores the premise that narrowly specialized and fragmented jobs, the hallmark of the assembly line, have very little value in today's marketplace. Companies need employees who can think on their feet, as well as in the shower, on the ride to work and in their sleep. Whether consciously or subconsciously, the most valued employees are always thinking of new and better ways to solve problems, improve methods and achieve goals.

An employee's abstract-reasoning ability is magnified manifold if he or she is flexible. By that, we are referring to individuals who are willing to modify their approach as changing conditions and circumstances require. They can easily shift gears to respond to the input and feedback of others.

Being flexible enables individuals to work effectively with others, to share knowledge and keep focused on what is really important.

The third quality, competency, refers to the skills set that an individual brings to a particular job. Competent individuals view them-



selves as works in progress. They are constantly trying to get better and to take on new challenges to hone their skills.

Competencies, particularly in today's marketplace, need to be continually evolving. They are not just something that an individual has or attains. Yesterday's competency is today's history lesson.

The fourth essential quality that adds to an employee's versatility is confidence. Confidence, when combined with problem-solving abilities, competence and flexibility, is the self-assuredness that enables employees to explore new options, share ideas and make decisions. Such individuals are eager to step forward, take responsibility and, most importantly, act.

On the other hand, individuals who are lacking in confidence spend too much time caught in their own inner dialogue, preoccupied with feelings of doubt that sap their energy. We have found that by the time someone is old enough to apply for a job, confidence is one of those qualities that

is already built-in-or is not. As much as you might like, confidence is not something you can wrap up and give to somebody.

As one employer said, "Someone who knows where they stand, is not afraid to move."

It takes the combination of all four of these attributes-being bright, flexible, competent and confident-to contribute to an individual's versatility.

That combination is very winning in today's marketplace. Such individuals can transfer from industry to industry and job to job and bring value wherever they go. They are able to see the big picture, come up with new ideas and opinions, recognize the value that others can make, and are constantly looking for ways to increase their own knowledge and expertise. They make excellent team members because they are flexible and confi-

dent in working with others and sharing knowledge. And they thoroughly enjoy tackling new and challenging assignments.

Bill Gallagher, President of ADS Financial Services Solutions, a provider of systems integration and computer-based solutions for the financial industry, agrees that "hiring smart today means hiring versatile." He says, "Our consultants work on an assignment basis, traveling every day of the year, forging new relationships-in an entirely new setting-with every assignment." Gallagher adds, "We'll take a risk hiring someone without technical expertise, but you can't teach someone to be confident or flexible."

Companies today are looking for employees who are versatile enough to move from one task to another, and who are eager to accept new responsibilities when the need arises. In the final analysis, the only way for a company to keep growing today is by hiring and developing more versatile employees. ■