



Stanford eCorner

Lessons Learned

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1485/Lessons-Learned>

Marrone shares the lessons that she learned at AgraQuest. She strongly believes in a diverse, trustworthy workforce and hiring people who believe in the product.



Transcript

It's very important that I work with people who are extremely fair and high integrity. And open communication is really critical. I am the type of person who likes to have employees involved in a lot of decision-making and strategic planning. And I believe that employees who have a lot of information are more productive employees and are more empowered, and that was the case at AgraQuest. And really important when hiring people for this type of business is, do they care about the environment? If someone is a nozzle head and they don't really... 'nozzle head' means someone who came from a chemical company and still adheres to really liking chemicals and is just doing it for the job. They have to care about the environment. And interesting interview question: Do you recycle? And what is their answer? You can tell when people are faking it. And do they volunteer in the community? Do they care about somebody, something other than themselves? That's really important. And I do believe that a diverse workforce definitely leads to better decision-making and higher productivity.

And that's a real goal of mine as well. And it's really important to have women in the management team. The dynamics of a conversation or a room is very different when you have more than one woman in a room together. Nobody's going to be as passionate about my business as I am. The Graduate School of Management students at UC Davis told me I have unreasonable passion for this business. So no one's going to have that as much. But you do have to have people who really believe. Those sales people? They had to believe in our product to sell it. They couldn't sell it if they just, "Oh, it's just any old product." And I do believe that I need to hire very trustworthy people. My husband was injured, dislocated a shoulder when I was traveling, and there were a group of AgraQuest employees that took care of him while I was away.

And those are really good employees. If someone's in an interview with me and I get a handwritten thank-you note, that person stands out in my mind. Of course, if they're equally qualified people, one sends me an internet note and one sends me a handwritten note, and they're equally qualified, I would hire the one with the handwritten note because they take the extra time in something personal. Anybody can just flip off an internet note for thanking somebody. So the lesson for you is, write handwritten thank-you notes when someone does something nice for you. Also, people who don't return my books or CDs are really... They're not trustworthy. I mean, a book is sacred to me. A CD... These are things that...

Of course, now, CDs are not as much because you download everything, but in the past, anyway. We already talked about hiring innovative, risk-taking people. This is very important not just for sales people but also for R&D people. It was interesting how little AgraQuest--there would be this weird culture developing of people who would say no to everything and not want to take risks. And over time I had to introduce a number of innovative innovation exercises to get people to brainstorm and think

more innovatively. And I don't know whether PhDs are just that way, but I was surprised that just being in an innovative company didn't mean that people remained innovative.