



Stanford eCorner

Finding People with the Right Passion

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How do you separate the missionaries from the mercenaries and weed through the overly-passionate? In the non-profit sector, it can be a challenge, says Christine Benninger, President of the Humane Society Silicon Valley. It's a difficult balance between personal conviction and compromise, and Benninger points out why it's important to find talent that's both mission-driven and able to work in a team.



Transcript

Say more about that. How did you find them? Find the right people? And how did you glue them to the organization so that they would stick? Some of it was by luck. You know, you put ads out there and by the grace of God somebody walks in your door who is absolutely amazing and shares the passion for you. I also brought a couple of my colleagues over from HP who I knew and trusted and could work. We could work well together on moving forward with some of the changes that need to go forward. And what did you say to a successful career person at HP that would say "Come on and do this crazy thing with me." What was the pitch like? Well, you know, it's sharing a dream. It's creating that vision not of what it is today but of what it could be and the difference that somebody that somebody could really make. And I think that that's something that was very compelling to a number of people. To think that it's like what I say, you know. When I worked for Hewlett-Packard I never went home at night saying, "Wow! We sold more computers today." But ? You're not kidding about that.

Yeah, it's true. But now I go home at night saying, "Wow! We found a home for Crash." Who was an 11-year old Collie mix who was with us for seven months and that is huge. That's absolutely huge. It touches the heart and you realize that you're saving lives one by one by one. And you know people can feel good about that. There is this almost missionary sense around the team that, at least the team I've met. And I wonder though, are there enough missionaries to fill all the spots you have and how do you keep the mercenaries from signing up for the hourly job just for the pay? I mean how do you sort the sheep from the goats, the true believers from the sort of people who are just looking for a time card to punch? Well, you know, the mercenaries are pretty to sort out. They seem to sort of see how they react. I used to actually have - my very first Basted hound that I adopted from the Humane Society was actually an epileptic. And it was always great doing an interview with Raymond in the room because she'd go into an epileptic fits.

And it was interesting to see how people reacted. So if you screamed and ran out of the room, it's probably not the right place for you. But the harder part with our profession is sorting out those that are true passionate because passion is a... Is there such a thing? Same? That you mean ? Yes there is, yes. How does that manifest? Because passion is an incredible thing. People who are passionate will do anything for the mission but they will do anything for the mission. And passion is very personal. When things that are personal, people oftentimes don't want to compromise. So if I'm absolutely passionate that this is the right way to go then teamwork goes out the door. People are more focused on undermining what's being done rather than working together as a team, which does require compromise to get something done.

So in non-profit works, it's important to find people who have that right balance.