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"If you can win the war in talent, everything else changes," says SendGrid CEO Sameer Dholakia. He describes how recruiting is a mission-critical function for a business, not a side task to be fit into one's day only after other tasks are completed. Employees should see recruiting as a privilege where they get to represent the company and attract the best people to join, Dholakia explains.



Transcript

- Recruiting, I believe, is thought about incorrectly by 95% of companies.. I happen to be fortunate in joining a company in 1995, straight out of this place, that was led by a founder CEO who, I believe, was in the 5% who deeply understood this and said, "Recruiting is a mission-critical function "for our business, and there's nothing more important "that we are doing than hiring great people." That is absolutely core, it is not my side task, a obligation that I may or may not get to.. It was priority number one.. He signaled it in his own behavior.. Joe would literally be on a call with a 21-year-old kid out of Stanford, out of MIT, out of CMU or Rice, amongst the best CS departments and grads in the country, convincing them that they had to come join us on our journey down at Trilogy in Austin, TX.. They had to come and they were gonna make a difference.. And he hung up the phone, and by the way, is a signal that we were doing the right thing, you would know a couple hours later, that same kid was getting a phone call from a guy named Bill Gates.. Because Gates understood and built Microsoft from day one around that same philosophy that talent was everything.. And he personally, and by the way, by that time, even in 1995, Microsoft was already a multi-billion dollar revenue company.. And he was still picking up the phone and calling 21-year-old kids straight out of school because he knew that is the lifeblood of your company..

If you can win the war in talent, everything else changes.. And so there are just lots and lots of examples about how, again, focus on people.. Focus on people and you'll build an extraordinary business.. In our case, 'cause by the way, I love this quote from Jim Collins' book, I'm sure a lot of folks here in the room read Good to Great, that the only great regulator of building great companies, at the end of the day, is getting, attracting and then keeping great people.. That is usually the ultimate constraint.. It is not any of these other things that he enumerates here.. It is about being able to do that, and so when I got to SendGrid, a handful of years ago, I wanted to make sure that we were bringing that same passion around recruiting that I was fortunate enough to grow up with.. To be exposed to early.. And to me, when I was 21, I was like "what?" I had never seen anything else, so I just assumed that's what most companies did.. I saw for the rest of my career that actually was not the way that most companies worked around recruiting..

That people often thought about recruiting as the thing I have to do after my day job.. And I've already got a full plate and I don't know when I'm gonna be able to fit this in.. And they thought about it as an obligation.. And one of the things we had to do was flip that and be like, "No, no, no, recruiting is a privilege." Because that means we, as a company, all your teammates here are saying, "We choose you to go represent us, "to go convince the best talent out there that they "wanna come join us." And to go and filter and make calls on what I believe is the single most important decision we make every single week, week in and week out.. And that is who we decide to give the next hoodie to.. Because you get that right, you get one 10X, you know they call these 10Xers.. You know, somebody that is a distinctive add for the role you need, and it's a game-changer for that whole function, for that whole team.. Sometimes for your whole company.. You get that thing wrong, man, getting the wrong hire, making that decision incorrectly, is expensive and painful and again, it's all about the people.. So focusing on the people..

So privilege, recruiting's a privilege, not an obligation.. I felt so passionately about this.. Anybody remember the movie Jerry Maguire? I can't remember age groups here, but I wrote the equivalent of a Jerry Maguire manifesto on why recruiting was so important.. It was six-page document and I sent it out to our team.. And I said, "This is how passionately I believe.. "Let's now debate every line in here." Until we feel comfortable it represents our collective view and then we sent it out to the entire company.. And we said, "Recruiting is everyone's number one priority." I never wanna hear, "We couldn't do that

interview slate," or "We lost that candidate," because we couldn't get enough people together for the interview, and they took another job with somebody else.. It is our number one priority always, and if you come to me and say, "This project, Samir, slipped by three days "because this team of people went and did that interviewing," I will say, "Bravo.. Thank you for doing that.. Good call." That's how I know you're prioritizing the way that I would want you to...