

## LET THOSE THAT CAN DO

**Y**ou've heard it, I'm sure, the American saying 'hire for attitude, train for skills'. The principle is that even the greatest novice with the right attitude – positive, anxious to learn – can acquire the skills they need and become valuable members of the workforce. At the most senior level this often happens; directors switch industry sectors, trading on their enthusiasm to bring a fresh eye to their new company. But is a can-do attitude really more important than aptitude?

My heart is warmed by junior level people who launch their career with 'can-do, will do'. They run with their instinct and conquer the new skills they need to progress. This enthusiasm is invaluable and should by no means be suffocated. But companies can suffer when there is a lack of guidance and can-doers are allowed to become gung-ho workers, propelled up the career ladder by little more than morale and confidence. Instead, managers must ensure that they take a strategic approach to learning and development.

### 'CAN DO' VERSUS SKILLS

Can-doers are people who feast on self-belief and are puzzled by colleagues who are less assuming. Whether 'can-do' is more important than specific skills depends on the makeup of a team. The best teams use their diversity to great effect; the critical balance between attitude and knowledge is what creates a valuable unit. To help achieve this balance, the team's leader must work to manage the can-doers and the risks they thrive on. The can-doer will hunt out all kinds of self-development opportunities, and their manager will need to be switched on to what helps (or hinders) the organisation.

I am a committed can-doer – always keen to find ways of solving apparently insurmountable problems. But, in taking a team into uncharted waters I always ensure the learning and development is aligned with business aims and objectives. In



A successful team needs the right blend of attitude and aptitude. **Lyn Bicker** explains why it's not just the precocious employees that demand appropriate training



### HOW TO HANDLE CAREER CAN-DOERS

#### ■ Channel their energy

Can-doers need to prove themselves regularly. Manage that determination and focus that energy with a challenging mix of business objectives and personal development.

#### ■ Simply the best

Can-doers are assertive and persuasive. They know they are – or will be – good at what they do and they instinctively know how to sell themselves. Enlist their support to help endorse key projects or inspire other people.

#### ■ Time management

Can-doers are likely to want a lion's share of access to your knowledge and experience. Make sure you don't forget the quieter, less demanding members of your team.

### HOW TO HANDLE THE RISK-AVERSE

#### ■ Give them a voice

Let can't-doers express their anxiety and then tackle their concerns with them, step by step.

#### ■ Safety in numbers

If people are nervous about challenges, suggest a mini-brainstorming exercise within a small team. It creates a comfort zone and nervous people will not feel so exposed.

#### ■ When fear is bigger than the reality

Can't-do attitudes can spread like a disease within a blame culture. Make sure suggestions and initiative are encouraged, not penalised.

order to succeed, companies need to adopt a strategic approach to people development. Training that does not reflect business growth issues makes for scattergun investment. Companies can avoid this lop-sided approach by undergoing a training needs analysis (TNA). This helps match business goals against corporate and individual learning. A TNA identifies the gap between how the organisation wants to operate and its current state, bringing together data from questionnaires, performance appraisal schemes and work samples. The result is a clear picture of hard and soft skills requirements as well as the other influences such as corporate culture, talent and individual aspirations. This knowledge ensures training resources are channelled where they are most needed for people to match their employer's – and their own – expectations.

I've known many companies to create a 'team template' as a tempting, less time-consuming – and they think less costly – solution to a TNA. The concept sounds feasible: simply create a blueprint for learning and development based on successful people. But what do you get? The business equivalent of Stepford Wives. You're in danger of supporting can't-doers and suppressing the can-doers who thrive on the very creativity and innovation an organisation needs in order to evolve.

So if you are a proud can-doer, or if you manage a can-doer, how can you harness undaunted zeal without crushing dedication and conviction? It's important to encourage the right culture and create a framework for change and development. By establishing an environment where an individual feels safe and encouraged, a can't-doer can learn to use undeveloped aspects of their character. Individual coaching and bespoke development activities such as team development workshops have proved highly successful here. Equally, with similar tools and techniques, can-doers can learn to appreciate that a more measured and skilled approach sometimes reaps the best rewards. ■

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