

hire education system

How our Best Bosses manage to find the star employees they need.

best bosses aren't born; they are made—by high-quality employees who refuse to settle for lesser leaders. Finding and hiring these picky workers isn't easy, especially for small-business owners, who are often competing against larger, better-financed rivals. That is why savvy bosses have to scout and select new employees more creatively than their peers.

When she finds someone she wants but she has no opening at the moment, she presents a written job offer with an estimated start date set for a few months ahead. The prehired worker, whether employed or not, is free to accept another job in the meantime. Not that anyone has, claims Hessian. A tour of the company—and an introduction to its upbeat staff—usually clinches the deal, says Hessian, who has hired eight employees using the approach. “This way we have a pipeline of fabulous people ready to be hired,” she boasts.

While Hessian courts prospective workers, Brian Scudamore requires candidates for jobs at the headquarters of the company he founded, 1-800-Got-Junk?, to endure a Darwinian process. For their first interview at the junk-removal franchise, based in Vancouver, they are herded along with as many as 11 other prospects into a room. There, executives fire questions at the group: Which leaders do they admire? What mistakes have they made? “It gives us an instant way to compare—who is the most energetic, who is the most argumentative,

who is the best communicator,” says Scudamore, 35. The 90-minute session ends with each candidate naming (out loud or on paper) who in the group is best for the job. No more than three

finalists move on to a second—and sometimes a third—grilling with a senior manager. Scudamore handles the final one-on-one. As grueling as the process sounds, only two workers at the 105-employee company have quit in the past three years. (For more on 1-800-Got-Junk?, please see fsb.com.)

But many bosses don't have access to Scudamore's flood of qualified applicants. Skilled construction workers are in such short supply in the Washington, D.C., area that BOWA Builders, based in McLean, Va., came up with the idea of recruiting local Latinos aggressively by advertising in Spanish-language newspapers and by printing fliers in Spanish as well as English. The company also offered to pay for classes in both languages. Currently about 40% of BOWA's 64-member field crew comes from Central or South America. This influx of skilled workers has allowed the company to grow revenues, says management, to about \$26.5 million last year, up from \$22.3 million in 2003, without sharply raising wages.

Best Bosses always think creatively about lining up top talent—even if that means hiring people who are threateningly capable. In 2003, Colin Angle, founder of robotics company iRobot in Burlington, Mass., recruited a vice admiral who was retiring from the Navy and an executive vice president from a \$700 million appliance business. “Hiring folks who are smarter than I am has allowed our company to grow in new ways every year,” insists Angle, who focuses on long-term strategy. “I obsoleted myself, but that was the right thing to do for the company.” □



ASIA KERRY

diane hessian, communispace, Watertown, Mass. Even if she doesn't have an opening, this CEO offers top prospects a job, hoping they'll join later.

Diane Hessian, 50, founder of Communispace, an Internet customer-research company in Watertown, Mass., has developed an unconventional technique she calls “prehiring.”