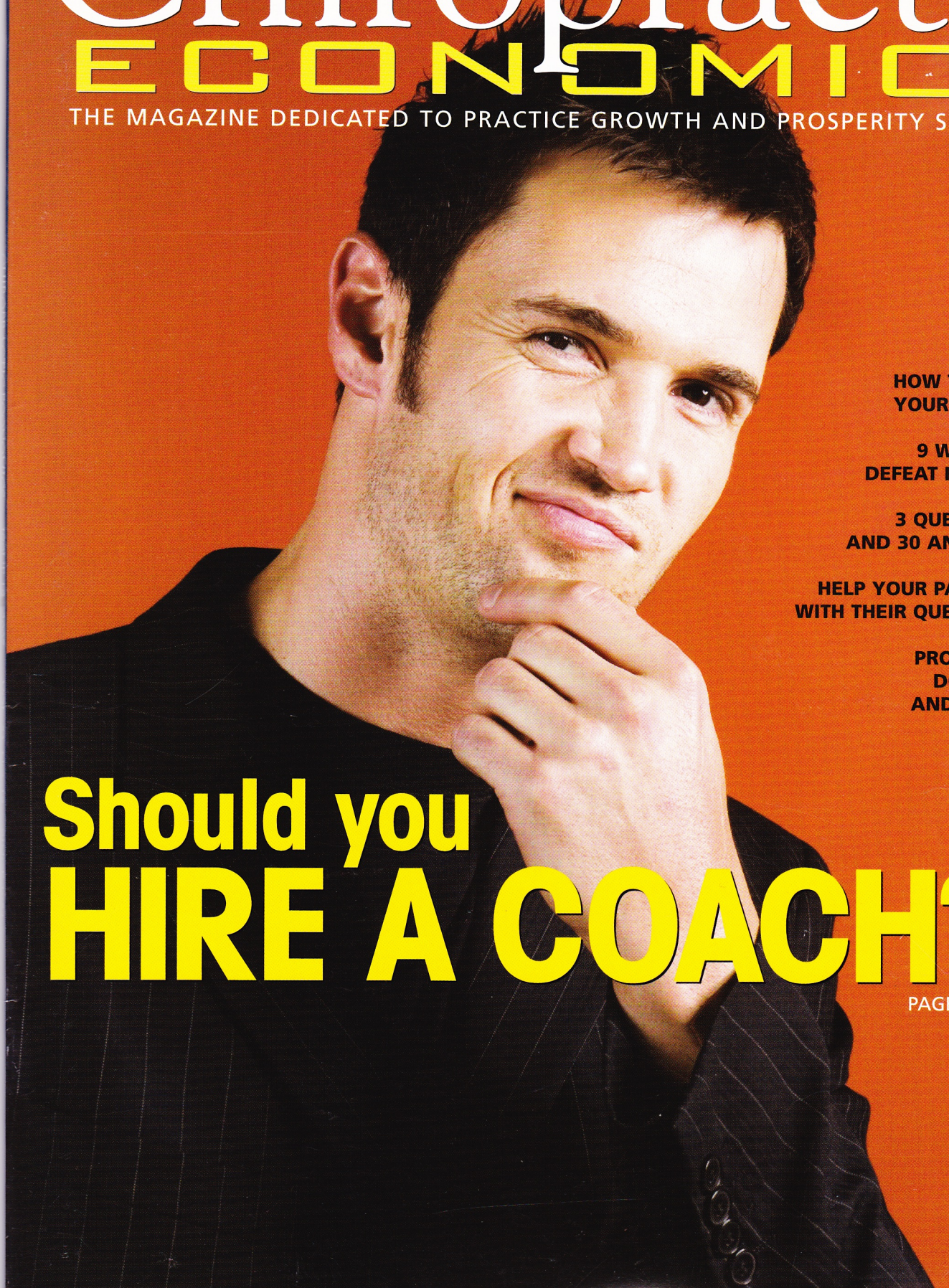


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Avoid accidental leadership

By Monica Wofford

People often become leaders by accident. In promotion and hiring decisions, senior and middle managers place employees in roles for which they might have the right skills, but not the right credibility.

Or, employees might be skilled, but lack the ability to teach as well as they perform.

When senior managers promote for the wrong reasons, they often get the wrong result — or at least mixed results. Accidental leadership is not an effective way of managing an organization.

Before you promote (or hire) the next person to a leadership role, reflect on three questions:

1. Does the individual have the skills for the job? Job skills extend far beyond the ability to run software, use a computer, or answer a telephone.

Does the individual have the skills to lead, guide, motivate, manage, and disperse rewards and consequences to those he will lead? Does she have the emotional intelligence skills to defer her own emotions for the greater good or better solution?

Does he have the people skills to manage conflict among the team, handle a major change in the organization, or calm a patient in a verbal escalation?

These are the skills of great leaders. You can teach someone to operate a computer, but the other skills can take months of development and sometimes years of experience, or trial and error, to acquire.

2. Does the team perceive her as credible? This

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quality is an elusive one because it relies on the perception of those the individual will lead.

Do team members think this person has any credibility? Would she be respected? Would she be able to handle an individual who has more seniority, but far less interest in management or leadership, if he balked at the promotion?

Credibility is a compilation of experience, tenure, expertise, likeability, and attitude, most of which cannot be taught in an on-

the-job training environment. Yet, many leaders are promoted in what can be called the “life jacket approach” — the leader is put in a position, pushed off the edge of the pool, and told to swim.

If he makes it, so does the team. If he flails, so does the team.

Why put people in these positions without first investigating if they have the credibility to command the helm and, if not, help them develop it quickly?

3. Does he have a ‘first things

first’ philosophy? Stephen R. Covey, in his book, *First Things First*, says a value-driven person looks at the value of a decision, project, or person prior to taking action. Those who adhere to this philosophy are more likely to create a loyal following of well-developed, highly motivated employees who complain less and wish to stay on a job longer.


On the other hand, those who subscribe to a “fire drill” philosophy are likely to make snap decisions without considering the larger picture. They are likely to be reactive instead of proactive, and have a following of employees with similar reaction patterns.


Thus, those with a “fire drill” philosophy develop employees with that same philosophy and the entire epidemic of reactionary behavior becomes contagious.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

To avoid accidental leadership, plan for the future — prepare a funnel of candidates for leadership roles before a vacancy exists.

Develop strong skills in communication, relationship building, rapport building, and trust building in your team members. Teach them how to help people grow.

Most of us do not acquire these skills or behaviors by accident, and conferring a title on someone does not develop them. The only way to acquire leadership skills is with intent and preparation. 

 *Monica Wofford is a nationally known trainer, author, and coach. The author of Contagious Leadership and Contagious Customer Service, she inspires audiences to produce results. She can be reached by phone at 866-382-0121 or through the Web site, www.monicawofford.com.*

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