

# FINDING THE IDEAL TEAM PLAYER

A combination of traits makes for the best employees.

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Whether you are an owner or an employee doctor, one of the biggest stressors you face is likely staff management. This article shares something I recently learned about choosing the right people for your team. I attended the Global Leadership Summit in Chicago, and I heard author Patrick Lenicioni expound on points from his

book *The Ideal Team Player*.<sup>1</sup> It was an epiphany for me, and it bears repeating.

All of us would like to view our employees as a well-trained team, putting forth their best efforts because of their devotion to the team and to the mission of the practice. All too often, however, the team feels more like a dysfunctional family. We know it does not feel cohesive, but we cannot put a finger on why. The office may seem balanced on the surface, filled with varied personalities, motivation levels, and work ethics: the go-getter, the friendly but fruitless, and the meticulous but socially awkward. I have thought about this for some time, and I have even implemented a simple personality test into my interviews. I was on the right track: I was searching for specific personality traits and the underlying wiring in applicants. Until I heard Mr. Lenicioni speak, however, I did not realize the crippling impact that even a small compromise in traits could have on the team's functionality.

## IDEAL COMBINATION OF TRAITS

In interviews, instead of focusing on the personality of the applicant, we must focus on what is needed for the team. The ideal team player, according to Mr. Lenicioni, is humble, hungry, and smart (socially).

To be clear, a humble person is not someone who lacks self-confidence. Humility is not thinking less of yourself but rather thinking of yourself less. "Hungry" describes someone with a strong work ethic who is passionate about what he or she does and is willing to do whatever it takes. A smart person is someone with emotional common sense, someone who is self-aware and able to adjust his or her behavior according to how it is being received.

Sounds great, right? It is obvious that these are good traits to look for, but it is even more important to identify when these traits are missing and to recognize the consequences that these deficits can cause for the team.

People who are only humble can become the "pawn" in the office. They are not socially smart enough to stand up for themselves and not hungry enough to care; therefore, they sit back quietly and take the blame. People who are only hungry, but not humble or smart, can become the "bulldozer" of the office. These people may be incredibly effective, but they (unintentionally) cause a tense work environment, because they are focused only on the task at hand and are unaware of the effects of their abrasive tactics and their inability to share their accomplishments. Finally, people who are smart but lack humility and hunger may be seen as "charmers." Everyone loves them, and they are excellent with patients. They are not, however, productive members of the team.

## DIGGING DEEPER

If an applicant has only one of the three traits, you obviously need to show him or her the door. It is much harder, however, to turn away people who are strong in two of the three traits and lacking only in one. As difficult as it may seem when this makes the applicant pool shallow, consider it a bullet dodged.

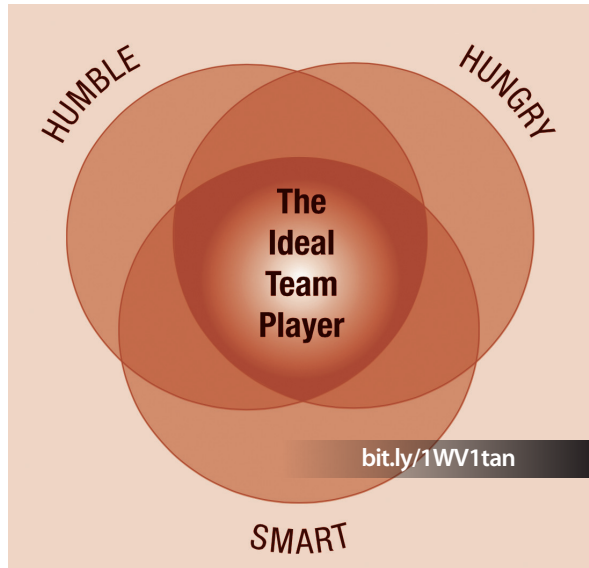
When people are both humble and hungry but not socially smart, they become "accidental mess makers." These people mean well, but they unintentionally ruffle feathers because of their lack of self-awareness and social awareness. The humble and hungry person will be extremely productive, but because he or she has no filter, others in the office will have to make excuses for his or her behavior.

The person who is humble and smart but not hungry will be the "loveable slacker" in the office. He or she will barely meet goals and never go above and beyond but be loved by patients. Even the staff will like him or her, but the person will damage the team.

The most dangerous of all and the hardest to spot is the individual who is hungry and smart but not humble. This is the "skillful politician." Ambitious and

## THE IDEAL TEAM PLAYER

Print this interview guide before conducting your next interview.



Use this self-assessment tool with your current staff members.



hard-driving, he or she knows how to make him- or herself appear humble. This person interviews well but can do immense damage once hired.

In the sidebar, *The Ideal Team Player*, you will find a web address for an interview guide that will help you assess these traits in your applicants. Print it out, and use it in your next interview. You will be glad you did.

### IN THE REAL WORLD

When hiring staff, we typically overemphasize people's skills by ranking these disproportionately against their personality traits. A skill can be trained, but core traits and behavioral characteristics are thought to be set by the time people are 16 years old.

When you have an applicant you consider a finalist, take the interviewee outside or to a store to grab some groceries or supplies for the office. You need to know how this applicant interacts with other people in a real-world setting.

Always ask the same questions more than once. For example, if you think there may be a problem with conflict, ask about it outright, then again two more times in a situational context. Finally, scare the applicant with brutal honesty: "We are so serious about these traits. If you have them, you will flourish here, but if you don't, you will hate it and be miserable!"

### ASSESSING THE TEAM

These steps may help in hiring new staff, but what about the team members you already have? If they do not boast all three qualities, all is not lost. In the sidebar *The Ideal Team Player*, you will see a web address for a free online self-awareness test. Gather your employees together, and ask them to use this test and score themselves in each category. Then, separate the team into groups according to the category in which they ranked the lowest—their weakest area. Allow the members of these groups to give each other advice on how to improve. You may be shocked at how honest they become when they are among their peers with the same weakness.

Ask your staffers to make their own commitments as to what they want to change about themselves and how. Then, create accountability. Tell them how serious you are about establishing a cohesive healthy team. Next, have the courage to remind them over and over again when they are not following through. They will either get better or get frustrated and quit. Either way, it is OK.

### CONCLUSION

Creating and maintaining a happy and productive team is incredibly difficult. It is hard in small offices, because employees are often overwhelmed by having to wear so many hats. It is hard in large offices, because there are even more personalities to balance. Often, a select few end up doing the work for the majority, which creates bitterness and dissension.

Leadership is crucial to the success of your practice and, ultimately, to your peace of mind. It starts with the fundamentals. Hire for traits over skill, and work to develop character in the employees you already have. ■

1. Lencioni PM. *The Ideal Team Player*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 2016.

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