

Hiring the Hospitality Gene  
*Jan M. Smith*  
*Inland Management Group*

I was recently dining at one of my favorite restaurants in town and in the middle of our dinner, I turned to my husband and shared that our server has “It”. Our server greeted us with a warm welcome, anticipated and fulfilled our needs, and sent us on our way with a positive opinion about the dining experience. Yep, she really did have “It”.

“It” is the Hospitality Gene. One who possesses it understands that Hospitality refers to the relationship process between a guest and a host, and the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with kindness and genuine goodwill.

Not all service workers at the restaurants, retail stores, hotels, or any other service organization in town have the **innate ability to genuinely serve**. You can picture in your minds the ones who curtly ask, “What do *you* want”, or those who make you feel like you have done something wrong in asking for help. However, there are those who have the Hospitality Gene. They are the ones who serve you authentically with a sparkle in their eye, engage you, and demonstrate a **desire to accommodate** you as a customer. This is the type of employee you want representing your company.

As you look at your staff, identify those with the Hospitality Gene; those without it are your challenge. An achievable goal in 2009 is to ensure you hire the right service person when you have your next open position.

You might wonder, “How do I hire one of these Hospitality Gene individuals?” According to *The New Gold Standard, The Ritz Carlton Hotel Company* by Joseph Michelli, “A thoughtful process for finding job candidates who are dedicated to service pays bountiful dividends...in employees who produce more, are happier, and stay longer.” It would make sense then, as a business owner, to place importance on the hiring process.

We often hire people because they can “fog a mirror”, that is, they are living, breathing individuals who happen in to your workplace just as your star employee has walked off the job. A few cursory questions later, and an offer is made. Hiring is often done in haste, leaving the company to repent in the long run.

No one loves to go through the recruiting process; job descriptions, job posting, resume reviewing, interviewing... who has time for this stuff anyway? Each time you interview a candidate you question, “How do I know this applicant can do the job?” or “How do I know if this person will fit in to my organization?” The wrong hire can be expensive to your organization, but the recruitment process doesn’t have to be risky. Follow these tips and your hiring will be more effective:

## FEBRUARY SERVICE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING:

### Tip #1: PREPARE

**Establish what Hospitality means to you and your service-related company.**

**Organize your hiring practices for the best advantage to hire the Hospitality Gene.**

- Prepare by developing job descriptions for each position, including the desired and required service criteria. This may not sound critical, but it is the only way to match required skills to the skill set of the applicant. At the very minimum, develop a list of skills necessary for each position and determine if the candidate's skill set is sufficient, or if they can be trained.

### Tip #2: ESTABLISH RAPPORT

**Hire for attitude: Why focus on attitude? Skills can be taught. Attitude can't... applicants are either born with the Hospitality Gene or they aren't.**

- Spend time making small talk with applicant before getting to the interview questions. This initial "breaking ice" moment gives you insight into the applicant's hospitable style.

### Tip #3: GATHER AND PROVIDE INFORMATION

**Use behavioral questions to evaluate if the applicant has the Hospitality Gene.**

**Remember, just as important in asking the question, is listening to the applicant's answer.**

- Have you worked in the hospitality industry? Where? What did you do? What did you like (dislike) about this (these) job(s)? *(Listen for relevant work experience and likes or dislikes that may or may not fit the job.)*
- How would you go about helping a customer feel welcome? *(Listen for accommodating style, knowledge of hospitality)*
- How do you think you would handle a delicate or complicated request if you didn't know what resources we could offer? *(Listen for resourcefulness, creativity)*
- Tell me about an example of how you turned around an initially bad customer exchange into a positive outcome. *(Listen for knowledge of effective service recovery, independent thinking, accommodating style.)*
- Describe what you would say if asked to talk about your service philosophy to a group of subordinates. *(Listen for personal hospitality philosophy.)*
- What types of people do you like best? And least? Why? *(Listen for openness and a lack of prejudice.)*
- What do you think excellent customer service would be in our business? *(Listen for service knowledge and values.)*
- Tell me about a time when someone failed to provide good service to you. Give me examples of what the person did poorly. How could he/she have improved? *(Listen for service knowledge and values.)*
- What do you think is most important in building long term, repeat customer business? *(Listen for work ethic, service values, and willingness to serve.)*

- Sooner or later, we all have to work with an unreasonable customer. What types of behavior would you find most frustrating? How would you respond under such a circumstance? (*Listen for openness, tact and ability to handle difficult people.*)

**Tip #4: EVALUATE AND SELECT**

**Remember, past behavior tends to predict future behavior.**

- Call applicant's business references. Talk to business owner, describe your position, customer base, products and services... ask them if they believe the candidate would be qualified.

Make the right hiring choice. The real job of hiring for service-related positions is finding individuals who possess the Hospitality Gene!

*Jan M. Smith is the Founder and Principal of Inland Management Group, a Human Resource Consultancy located in Temecula. For an additional complementary list of hospitality interviewing questions, please contact Jan Smith at (951) 302-6483, or email at [jsmith@inlandmgtgroup.com](mailto:jsmith@inlandmgtgroup.com).*

Next Month: Keeping Your Competitive Edge in Today's Challenging Environment.