

LEADERS & SUCCESS

# IBD'S 10 SECRETS TO SUCCESS

## NEVER STOP LEARNING Snagging

### The "A" Team

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4 Getting the best players on your executive team is more important than ever before.

"Any competitive advantage seems more short-lived than in the past because information travels so much faster than in past decades," said Geoffrey Smart, president and chief executive of **ghSMART**, a Chicago-based management assessment and coaching firm.

"Having a better team is one of those sustainable advantages..

Smart, who's worked with companies such as Motorola and Citadel Partners, says the key is to figure out who the "A" players are and then surround yourself with as many as you can.

"An A player is someone who has outstanding abilities in more than one critical business area, such as finance, marketing, operations, manufacturing and leadership," he said. "A-type chief executives are typically a 'triple threat' -- they excel in three or more major areas -- and have no major weakness in any of the critical tasks..

So how do you find and hire A players.

Smart says there are five steps to nabbing the top execs for your company.

\*\* Build a virtual bench. Just as baseball teams have a bullpen of pitchers to help when the starting pitcher gets into trouble, firms should cultivate a roster of potential executive hires to fill vacancies when they arise.

Constantly meeting and learning about new people ensures you'll hire the right person for the job when there's an opening.

\*\* Create a scorecard. Rather than just describe a job's duties, specifically list the goals that need to be met. It's not enough to say a potential hire would make a good leader for your sales team. You need to spell out that a good sales vice president grows sales by

25% a year for at least three years. Once you have the specific criteria for measuring candidates, you can narrow down your potential hires to a select few.

\*\* Dig deeper with interviews. Now that you've whittled the candidates to one or two potential hires, schedule in-depth interviews. "These should be three-hour interviews where you go through their entire career and ask questions about every job they've had," Smart says. Find out what they were hired for, what they accomplished, what mistakes or disappointments they had, what they think their former boss will say about them and why they left the job.

\*\* Choose your own references. Don't simply call the references he or she provides. Glean from the interview who would best be able to vouch for the potential hire and ask for contact information. If the candidate is truly a gem, past employers will sing their praises and be specific about what they were good at.

\*\* Perform background checks. You've heard of all the embellishments people put on resumes. Sometimes, folks are so creative it's hard to sniff out a phony degree. Pay for a professional to do a background education and criminal check as a final test before hiring.

Smart says following these steps will result in success 90% of the time. "In most cases you'll be happy you hired them..