

Assigning Seats on the Leadership Bus

Thanks to business guru Jim Collins, the idea has become part of every leadership culture: get the right people on the bus and then get them in the right seats on the bus.

It's a good idea.

Few things matter more than hiring the right people and recruiting the right volunteers. But getting a quality person is only half the battle—you then have to make sure they are situated where they need to be organizationally.

Meaning, you have to place them in a “seat” on the bus that fits their natural abilities and spiritual gifts, allows their natural passions to flow and is in accord with their personality type. Collins is right: getting the right people on the bus, and then getting them in the right seat, is critical.

Let's set aside getting the right people on the bus... how do you know when someone is in the right seat?

I was asked this recently and gave an off-the-cuff answer that intuitively reflected my years of experience, but I had never stated it before. Upon reflection, I became even more convinced of its truth.

Here's what I said:

“If they intuitively make the right decision 60% of the time, they are in the right seat. You can coach them up to 80-90% in terms of good decision making, but if they don't bring that foundational 60% to the seat, it's not a good fit.”

[I've written about the five “Cs”](#) of effective hiring: character, catalytic, chemistry, calling and competence. The 60% has to do with competence.

Competence has to do with the raw capability, the essential skills, needed to do a job. I've often commented that this is the least of the five, as it is the one thing that can, indeed, be taught.

I have hired countless numbers of people who had no background in ministry. In many ways, I like this. They bring their personal, educational and corporate skills to the table without preconceived notions regarding the practice of ministry. The basic competencies needed vary from role to role, but generally I look for the ability to get along with others, enthusiasm, a positive attitude and raw leadership gifts.

But there is one aspect of competence you can't teach: the basic 60% of intuitively correct decision making. This cannot be taught, coached or mentored. When this isn't present, no matter how much I've poured into them, they consistently make poor decisions in light of mission, vision, values and target.

It's like they just can't "get it."

I know I have the right person in the right seat when they come to me for coaching, share how they are going to handle a situation or a decision they are planning on making, and I am able to say, "That is exactly what I would do." Or, whether I would have had the wisdom and insight to make the same call myself, I can wholeheartedly say, "That is a great decision."

So when trying to find someone's seat on the bus, realize what you can – and can't – coach. You can get them from 60 to 80 or 90, but you can't take anyone from zero to 60.

> [Read more from James Emery White.](#)
