

# Brightlights

Connecting technology companies with great people



## A Monthly Newsletter With Leadership, Recruitment and Sales Tips for Small and Mid-Sized Technology Firms - October '08

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*"The more intensely we feel about an idea or a goal, the more assuredly the idea, buried deep in our subconscious, will direct us along the path to its fulfillment."*

Earl Nightingale

### Hiring for Talent and Passion

Paul Chen is a very successful entrepreneur with two profitable buyouts/exits for his businesses. He knows how to grow technology companies and he mentioned connecting with a number of his clients recently for a real-time reading on their upcoming IT spending plans. He plans to manage his business based on a significant drop in IT spending. With that in mind, it's clear that there will be less hiring but also that each and every hire will be that much more important, and that much more scrutinized, for the right fit of capabilities.

Regardless of the economic climate, for more than 20 years I've made it a practice to promote talent and passion over skill and experience, and frankly I've very rarely been disappointed. Generally, when people are being interviewed the hiring manager uses a task-and-experience job description to find candidates. Then the hiring manager focuses on a resume which highlights skills acquired through schooling, training, and/or experience. I believe that while skills and experience are important, talent and passion are even more vital to real job performance success and should be given greater weight.

People do their best when they are doing things that they naturally do well (have talent for) and enjoy doing (have a passion to perform). On the other hand, when people are performing jobs for which they may have had adequate training, but for which they lack talent and driving passion, they tend to be mediocre and disengaged. Over the years I have seen again and again how two equally trained professionals can perform the same job and yet produce opposite results in terms of quality and customer satisfaction. This is solely because of the talent and passion, or lack thereof, that they brought to the task.

Talent refers to the natural predisposition to be highly effective in certain areas. Marcus Buckingham's book *StrengthFinders* talks to the logic in giving people the tools to understand their strengths, and then trying to find jobs that puts those strengths to good use. For one person, it might include explaining ideas, for another it might be sensing the emotional state of others and having the ability to adjust, as needed, to build rapport and confidence. When people perform work that requires them to use skills that rest on the foundation of their natural talents, they tend to excel far beyond what would be expected by their amount of education in that field.

Passion refers to the feelings, or emotional responses, that move us to behave in certain ways. A manager can bark out orders all they want but by making sure that you hire people who will be naturally fired up with passion by their work, you will find an incredible source of natural super-performance power.

Following are a few questions I've found useful in ascertaining people's talent and passion:

**Whom do you most admire?**

This says a lot about the person's foundations and aspirations in life. For me it was my father. He was a small clothing manufacturer in Montreal who was always trying to add value to his clients. He would go out of his way, when travelling to retailers in small towns in Quebec and Ontario, to help his clients with ways to brighten up their in-store presentation, give them tips on selling more clothing, etc. He gave me a very clear set of guidelines around being ethical and honest with my clients and for that I'm forever grateful.

**What are you most proud of?**

This talks to the individual's inner aspirations and potential to reach their goals. For me it was making the decision to finish off my second year with CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) in Nigeria, even though every fiber in my body told me enough was enough. I taught Biology and Chemistry in a high school in a small town in Nigeria called Auchi. The first year was exciting, but challenging, but I became ill with malaria and a few other ailments and after a summer away I had to face the challenge of returning for another year that was my commitment to the organization. I remember vividly sitting in the airport in Rome waiting to fly back and wondering how I would be able to face myself if I left before my two years was up. I finished my stint and, even with all the challenges, was able to prove to myself that I could keep a commitment. This has stood me in

good stead, in good times and in bad.

### **What are you passionate about?**

This deals with what drives the person. For me, it's the chance to help people (both companies and individuals) in their efforts to be as good as they can be. The recruiting business exactly fits with my inner aspirations. If I would have had even halfway decent experiences with recruiters when I was in my first years of business I might have actually considered getting into the profession earlier. It turned out that it took me a while to find my true "calling" but once I understood how much I could get out of the profession, and put back into people's lives, I was hooked. I've been able to feel engaged and excited every day I go to work. Isn't that a great feeling!

Remember, there are some qualities that you just can't teach, and talent and passion are two of them. Someone who does not know your specific systems, or who doesn't have a particular Rolodex of clients, can quickly learn how to use your tools and become involved in your industry. On the other hand, someone who lacks empathy or the will to break through all the barriers in business will never quite get the knack of connecting with the community of clients and prospects that are the lifeblood of your business.

## [A Free Teleforum:](#) **Adapting Your Business During Times Of A Crisis In Confidence**

Brightlights, in conjunction with CATA, is moderating a free November 12 (11:00 a.m.) panel teleconference focused on:

- Spending intentions in the various IT sectors and what they signal for software companies and software M&A activity
- Creating a laser-like focus in your value proposition
- Deciding on your ideal customer and how to reach them at the lowest cost
- Managing and motivating people and competing for talent in challenging times
- Trade-offs that will impact your salability and exit valuation in the future: profitability vs. growth, R&D vs. sales, market focus vs. expansion, etc.

Speakers include:

**Ken Bender - the Managing Director of U.S. based Software Equity Group**, one of the world's most respected investment banks serving the software and technology sectors.

**Cal Haverstock - the former President of Prime Canada, MAI Canada, Bull HN Information Systems, and Star Data.** He provides consulting services to organizations for turnarounds, strategic planning, team development and out-sourcing .

**Len Wechsler - the former President of Lifeline Systems Canada, Inc.** a firm which was acquired by Philips Electronics in 2006 and which he grew to own a 60% share in its marketplace.

I will be focusing on the impact of challenging times on motivating your people and will be moderating the forum.

## DVD of the Month

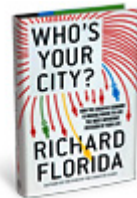


### *"Rudy"*

Based on a true story, Rudy is about a blue-collar kid whose father worships Notre Dame football but who would never dare to dream that any of his sons could be a part of the team. The film is entirely about Rudy's ceaseless if sometimes wavering commitment toward that goal, despite tremendous odds against him include physical stature, education requirements, the dismissiveness of coaches, poverty, his father's envy, and endless delays of one kind or another. This is the sort of film that looks back on a life and says the battle was its own reward, not the glory.

The movie is slightly dated (1992) and has none of the bang-bang shoot 'em up of some of today's films, but if you like great acting, superb dialogue, and a clear message of perseverance against all odds it makes for a great evening of viewing.

## Book of the Month



### *"You Are Where You Live"* by Richard Florida

Richard Florida believes that globalization has meant a tendency for "higher-level economic activities such as innovation, design, finance, and media" to cluster in an ever smaller number of locations. In his new book, *Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life*, Florida makes the case for why place matters and explains how to determine which cities will "encourage people to do more than they otherwise would, such as engage in more creative activities, invent new things, or start new companies."

More people are on the move than ever: According to the U.S. Census

Bureau, over 40 million Americans relocate every year, and the average citizen moves once every seven years. The well-being of such people, says Florida, is as dependent on a choice of destination as it is on a choice of a spouse or profession. It's true, he concedes, that new technologies allow more people to work remotely. But folks still congregate in certain areas "because of the powerful productivity advantages, economies of scale, and knowledge spillovers such density brings," he says. In this "spiky" world, the tallest points are innovation hubs. These include the areas around Seoul and San Francisco, which generate the most patents; "mega-regions" such as the "Bos-Wash" corridor, including Boston, New York, and Washington, which generates \$2.2 trillion in output; and the region from Osaka to Nagasaki, which generates \$1.4 trillion.

Florida posits some interesting questions and makes us take a serious look at where we live and what frames of reference we should be using when making those decisions.

# Brightlights

**Brightlights recruits executives for small and mid-sized technology firms and helps these companies make the best of their people. If you have any questions around industry best practices within the technology sector, or particular challenges concerning your organization's people issues, please feel free to contact me.**

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