

# “I KNEW FROM THE FIRST DAY THEY WERE THE WRONG FIT”

words / Matt Scott illustration / Matt Herring for Ikon Images

You're new to management and keen to develop a winning culture. Tip one: hire the right people

Once the disciplinary meeting had finished, Michelle Wright knew she'd made a mistake. It wasn't her who'd been the subject of the meeting, however, but one of her employees.

Wright's mistake had simply been not intervening early enough to manage the situation and stop it getting so bad.

“I knew from their first day that they were the wrong fit for the company,” she says. “I wish I had not allowed that situation to rumble on because it was a very damaging situation both for the company and the individual concerned. It is a very draining situation and not a nice place to be for anyone, and it is the furthest point away from where I want to be as an employer.”

“You need to have good mentors and a culture to help people come through, and at that time we didn't have that in place – everyone was too busy – and that is also why I wasn't able to take steps to manage the situation earlier [before it got out of hand].”

Such challenges can be particularly acute for a new manager, who can find it difficult to effect the wider workplace culture change that may be needed. Instead, new managers must focus on the feel of their own team, and what it

means to work within that sub-sector of the company.

“You can't often influence an organisation's culture when you are at managerial level – that has to come from the CEO – but you can influence how it feels to be in your team,” Wright says. “How do you want your team to be perceived? What do you want it to feel like to work there? Keep that in mind with who you hire and how you manage your team.”

Wright says the first step to building the right culture for your organisation or team is recruiting the right people, with the right attitude and approach to work.

“I think the first rule of thumb for new managers is to avoid the trap of recruiting people like you – you are actively looking for difference,” she advises. “Most new managers make the mistake of hiring people just like them, which is not the way to build a team.”

“You're not looking for new friends; you're looking for someone who can add to a growing pool of talent,” she adds.

To help in the recruitment of new staff who fit the culture of Cause4, a fundraising and development partner to charities, Wright, who is CEO and founder, has introduced a three-month



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graduate intern programme. “We run a Living Wage internship where we pay them properly, but we also get the chance to see if they are the right cultural fit,” she says. “Culture is at the heart of everything [in business]. Successful organisations are based on strong cultures, so we not only recruit for people who we think can add value to the business, but we also look for people who fit the culture and want to work with us to build the culture.”

A big lesson for Wright in building the culture she wanted for Cause4 came when

she was able to meet and spend time with some of the tech giants of Silicon Valley.

“I was lucky to spend a week in Silicon Valley, and I met the Facebooks and Amazons, and they all talk incessantly about intentional culture,” she says. “So, if you are a new manager, you need to think about the culture you want to create [for your team] and work on it every day. If you don't, a culture will evolve anyway and it might not be a way of working that you like.”

Wright says it has taken her eight years to get near the culture she wants

for her company and that she has “made more recruitment errors than I care to remember” and “managed many situations with personnel badly”.

The key is to constantly learn from mistakes. “If you are open to learning and admit to staff when you could have handled situations better, you can't go too far wrong,” she says. “But, if I had known about the importance of culture when I was 28 and first starting out in a management position, things would definitely have been a lot easier.”