A Tale of High Expertise with Scoutmaster Phil

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April 13, 2020

Years ago, I was very active in Boy Scout Troop 602. I loved it. We did fun things—hiking, spelunking, canoeing, camping, whittling and fishing. One beautiful fall weekend Scoutmaster Phil took us on a camping trip near a beautiful lake with sandy shores and lots of sagebrush. We hiked, fished, played games and worked up a big appetite.

After dinner, Scoutmaster Phil told us he had a special treat. He opened his battle-scarred cooler in the back of his ancient pickup and pulled out an enormous, ice-cold watermelon. As he gave a thick slice to each of us, he also handed us a paper cup. He instructed us to make sure we spit the seeds into the cup and then toss the cup into the campfire when we were finished. Being a troop of teenage boys very few seeds made it into the fire.

The weather was perfect, so we decided we wouldn't bother setting up our tents and would just sleep under the stars. In the early morning hours, we woke up to the sounds of a fellow scout screaming in absolute terror. We grabbed our flashlights and quickly realized we were in the middle of a churning ocean of hundreds and hundreds of mice. They were everywhere—in our clothes, in our sleeping bags, in our boots and hats, on our camp chairs, in our backpacks, our food, everywhere.

The mice were clearly scavenging for watermelon seeds. Hibernation was only a month or two away. They were preparing for winter. Did Scoutmaster Phil know this would happen and that's why he told us to not spit those black seeds on the ground? He sure did.

His objective was to teach us to listen to those that are wiser and experienced because the lessons of life, including scary things and failures, are usually its greatest teachers.

When I mention employee, or refer to an employee, that also, by inference, includes outside consultants and contractors --often the highest order of "high experience" people.

So, what's the point of my story for you?

Employees are at the core of every organization, no matter what type of business you are in. There is no disputing that obvious fact. The vast majority are "good employees." A handful are "great employees." In many IT organizations, those "employees" can also include experienced, outside consultants.

These people make up the teams that together are the engine that creates the ideas, business strategies and approved tactics that are needed to build and grow a company. By their very nature they are highly experienced at their skills.

Let's talk about these key workers that are very experienced. What IS the value of that high expertise? Why should high expertise employees be a considerable focus when recruiting consultants and employees?

First, what is an employee with high expertise?

I'd like to answer this with a quote from a white paper entitled *A Data Expert or a Group of Amateurs*, written by Expert Analytics Founder and President, Jared Decker. It's a great description of how to identify workers with high experience.

"A good place to start is by identifying individuals with both broad and deep experience, There are many developers who can talk a good textbook talk about different ways to accomplish something, but relatively few who can tell you what works well and what doesn't across a wide range of technology and tool options (broad exposure), based on actual experience. Once found, the next step is to ensure they are not a "jack of all trades," citing exposure to strategic solutions, but can refer to actual experience deep in the details of a given technology (deep exposure)."

As you read this, you may have had a memory or two of these types of individuals. Maybe you're working with one now. Maybe you worked with a co-worker like this in the past. If so, you likely had a front row seat to the completion of great projects, a fun team, and an experience where everyone was a winner.

Second, why does employee experience matter?

Many companies look to younger age groups when building teams and not just because of cost issues. These new generations of talented workers have a lot to offer. They have strong science, engineering and math skills and are likely the most technologically smart employees in the company. Many possess exceptional drive and ambition. They desire to contribute to corporate innovation. They often bring fresh perspectives to the organizations that hire them. But the fact remains that *they are not highly experienced*.

Do they have the leadership skills and high levels of experience necessary to lead co-workers, teams, departments

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and companies forward to their goals? Many organizations are realizing there is a leadership drought.
They worry this lack of experience could hinder their progress. Many employees are not lacking the core skills or human desire to become tomorrow's great employees and team leaders, they're just lacking the experience. And that is almost always a big deal.

In an increasingly competitive world, no one should discount the potential that people with high levels of experience bring to the table.

Finally, why does high expertise talent make such a big difference?

High expertise people are usually more productive and innovative. Their years of cumulative experience has them in a place where they are happy, engaged, supportive of those around them and happy to share what they know. Low engagement, which can often appear in less experienced people, equals low productivity. This has been quantified in multiple research studies from Harvard, Gallup and Forbes. Teams with high expertise leadership are more productive. Low expertise employees are usually more unhappy employees, resulting in the undermining of the good work of others.

Finally, a notion that most people don't think about, but high expertise employees often help users and customers to have higher levels of satisfaction. Things get done right. Projects finish on time and within budget. Answers to questions are exact. Fewer bugs and programmatic weaknesses exist. Errors and needs are quickly identified and remedied. Everyone wins.

The benefits of hiring experienced talent

Building a culture that encourages creativity and innovation is very important for growth, scalability and sustainability.

Savvy business executives want that creativity and innovation, but just as often they can be reluctant about how independent and inexperienced employees can be integrated into established work cultures and corporate values.

High expertise employees bring less risk

Risk takers are essential to business success in the current work environment, yet that doesn't mean organizations have become less risk averse. There's a difference. To ensure the proper functioning of a well-oiled machine, employers need established and highly experienced professionals that can maintain order and temper inexperienced risk-taking. High expertise employees, with their longer resumes and list of accomplishments, have seen it all. They've navigated the turbulent waters of the business world, have significant team building and management expertise, clearly understand varying work cultures, and have weathered the highs and lows that accompany modern, and even industry-specific, business cycles.

High expertise employees have a better self-knowledge

High expertise employees are considerably more likely to be grounded, with clearly defined identities and work ethics. They know precisely who they are -- their strengths, abilities and areas of highly-defined skills. That self-awareness can better position these professionals to be strong and candid communicators, mentors, soundboards for lessons learned and examples of best practices.

High expertise employees are multi-skilled and talented

As organizations focus on business models that emphasize smart, lean operations, ideal employees tend to be those who can wear many hats. High experience employees have (usually) multiple career development paths have taken them through all levels, from junior developers right out of college to managing entire company divisions.

High expertise workers have worked for a larger variety of industries. They have picked up valuable knowledge and credentials along the way. They have mastered essential skills, engineered unique solutions to problems, and become specialists in specific areas. Their years of hands-on work, career development, real-world education and proven dedication make highly experienced talent ideal team leaders.

Key Takeaways

- IT and line of business departments should carefully consider the level of talent required in their respective areas and departments. Highly experienced professionals bring invaluable skills and talents.
- High experience people are usually more productive and innovative. Their years of cumulative experience has them in a place where they are happy, engaged, supportive of those around them and happy to share what they know.
- High expertise workers, with their longer resumes and list of accomplishments, have seen it all. This benefits everyone in the organization.

A Personal Note

I have been around the world of data for a long time. As the owner and CEO of The Data Warehousing Institute (launched in 1995) I had the opportunity to be around *high expertise people* for many years. We only selected high expertise professionals to be faculty at TDWI and it was the #1 major reason for its success, then and today. I recently began working with Expert Analytics, based in Dallas, because they are just that: EXPERTS of the highest order. The best I've ever seen--just like a bunch of Scoutmaster Phil's.

About the Author

Steven Crofts spends his spare time working with the Expert Analytics team. He provides leadership and vision for the firm's content, branding, messaging and consulting sales efforts. He is a successful sales and marketing leader, corporate executive and business driver. He has been involved in marketing leadership for both product and consulting service companies for over 30 years. Steven has held executive leadership positions at 1105 Media, Cardinal Business Media, iOLAP, CyberGroup and Incorta.
He was the CEO and President of The Data Warehousing Institute (TDWI), which he sold a few years ago.
Steven has been actively involved in the Boy Scouts America for over 30 years and enjoys working with and teaching great young men about providing service to others.

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