



CHAPTER 1

The Right People in Zebedee's Boat

Zebedee was speechless. The thought of losing his two sons and two key helpers had never occurred to him. These young men were his future, and he always assumed fishing was theirs. *What do I do now?* thought Zebedee. *I guess first things first; I need to find some new employees.* The city of Capernaum was known for producing hardworking men so that shouldn't be a problem. The real problem was replacing these specific four men. They were exceptional, they knew what to do, they listened, they asked the right questions, and each had strong leadership potential. "I guess it's not surprising that they are gone," murmured Zebedee. "It's hard to find and keep really great employees."



Just like many other businesspeople, in 2003 I purchased the Jim Collins book *Good to Great* and read it searching for the pearls of wisdom that would allow me to move my small company to a higher level. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this book, it is a compilation of stories detailing what makes some companies "great" while their peer companies continue to languish in the "good" category. One of the principles of getting from good to great is hiring the correct people and placing them in the correct job. In the Collins vernacular, this is known as the "right people in the right seats."²

As Collins elaborates, "The good-to-great leaders understand three simple truths. First, if you begin with 'who,' rather than 'what' you can more

easily adapt to a changing world ... Second, if you have the right people on the bus the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely goes away ... Third, if you have the wrong people, it doesn't matter if you discover the right direction: you *still* won't have a great company."³ These are powerful comments and have, as evidenced by the prolific use of "right people, right seat" throughout business literature, transformed the thinking of much of the business world. Of course, this concept is something we always intuitively knew from paying attention to sports, where the best teams were the ones with the right guys in the backfield or playing forward or pitching. But Collins was able to show it was true through his interviews with both good and great companies.

All that is presented in *Good to Great* is fantastic advice. The difficulty, in my experience, is twofold. First, who are these "right" people to put on the right seat on the bus? Second, how does a small company—where the HR department is also the office manager and the marketing coordinator—compete against major employers with staff and budgets to follow the employee recruitment philosophies expounded in *Good to Great*?

My experience at small companies over the years in the recruitment and retention of employees is often unconventional. The recruitment process may consist of placing notices on trade websites, association bulletin boards, and employment websites, as well as through word of mouth. We send employment notices to colleges and universities in areas of the country that are experiencing some level of economic downturn, assuming that potential employees may be interested in geographical relocation. When this idea fails, we turn to professional employee recruiters. When we do find a capable candidate, our process is to have two or three existing employees meet the candidate and spend enough time to develop an opinion of the person. They are looking to see if the candidate has an acceptable level of technical competency and if the candidate's personality is compatible with our existing staff. When we've decided to offer a job, it becomes one of the senior management people's responsibilities to "go out and get them hired." Occasionally we check employment references, but since most of the time these responses are so noncommittal, even for the outstanding applicant, that effort is often deemed a waste of time.

There is no question this process is fraught with problems and could stand a significant amount of improvement. But remember, we are talking

about employers who are entrepreneurs and have gotten to where they are under their own steam. Most are simply continuing a process that has worked well for them in the past.

Truth be told, the unconventional process used by numerous small businesses is not that unconventional. Geno Wickman, in his book *Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business*, outlines a slightly more sophisticated process. Wickman promotes a simple yet powerful system called the Entrepreneurial Operating System,⁴ and one component of this system is to first identify the core values of your company. If you're like me, at first I envisioned this as a lengthy process that entails serious soul searching and potentially therapy after it's completed. Not so with Wickman's process. Pick your top three employees and list what is special about them, which you want to replicate and be the image of your company. Shorten this list to a handful of characteristics and you're basically done. Well, maybe there is a little more than that, but not much. Simplicity is the key. With this list of core values in hand, you use it to make all your personnel decisions. When deciding if someone may not be the right fit for your bus (or Zebedee's boat), use the list to evaluate him or her, give the employee tangible measurements to improve, and if ultimately necessary, use it as a determination for dismissal.

What is startling about this process is the traction system yields more personal characteristics as opposed to technical capabilities. While *Good to Great* talks of the rigorous nature of working for these types of companies and the need for them to always hire the brightest and the best, *Traction* is about getting people who are compatible with the nature or character of the company. Of course, everyone wants the right people, so the question is (and always will be): who are these right people? Geoff Colvin's book *Talent Is Overrated* takes a different angle on the concept of right people.⁵ For Colvin, the right people are not the ones with an innate ability or the ones who work extra hard, they are the ones who have developed a habit of deliberate practice that makes them great. Colvin says you as the employer can make the right people.

Of course, the premise up to this point is we all want to make sure we hire the right people. Unfortunately, we also know that no one is inherently the perfect employee and that it is the prevailing business culture, whether at our place of business or at a previous employer, which develops that person into being the right person. So now the question is what characteristics

make an employee a right person, and what can our workplace environment do to develop those characteristics in an employee? But instead of looking at Fortune 500 companies or other twenty-first-century business studies that evaluate employee impacts on business success, I will look at that twenty-first-century issue through the lens of the Bible to answer that question.

To examine the implications of having the right people on a team, I have selected two examples of teams God used in the Bible and one parable of right people and wrong people. The first team is that of God and his prophets who ministered to the Old Testament Israelites. Specifically, we will look at how Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel formed a team to minister to the Israelites in exile. The second example is that of Jesus and His disciples. We will begin with Jesus's defined mission, how He selected the apostles, look at the diversity of the apostles, and finally how He used the apostles' potential to train them. For the third example, I have chosen the parable of the ten minas to elaborate on the significance of having the right people versus the wrong people.

God and the Prophets

Right people are created by their environment, which includes their supervisors and mentors, the type of work they do, and the atmosphere of their surroundings. My first example of right people as found in the Bible is a group rarely considered a team. This team I'm thinking about is God and His Old Testament prophets, who all worked together for one purpose. Most of us know the story in a general sense. God selected, for some unknown reason, a man named Abraham to be the father of His favored nation. This favored family, called the Israelites after Abraham's grandson, was just like all of us—rebellious, opinionated, and prone to the occasional lack of good judgment. God's agreement with this family was that in return for worshipping Him and following His none-too-rigorous commandments, He would bless them. Being blessed in the ancient Near East four thousand years ago was a big deal. But the Israelites, now large enough to be a legitimate nation, could not consistently hold up their end of the agreement. So God assembled a team to be their advisors and be thorns in the sides of the rulers of this new nation. They were to remind the Israelites of their shortcomings and the potential ramifications if they

did not start holding up their side of the agreement with God. This team of prophets was not your typical group. They made up a diverse group, each endowed with certain skills or traits that made them unique to the tasks for which they were called.

So as the Israelites continued a downward spiral of not adhering to their agreement with God, God began to have these prophets warn of their punishment. Beginning in about 660 BC, the southern tribes of Judah (Abraham's descendants were divided into twelve tribes, two of which comprised the southern tribes of Judah and the remaining ten tribes comprised the northern tribes of Israel) were led by a series of particularly nasty kings who practiced many of the acts forbidden in their agreement with God. God sent the prophets Zephaniah, Nahum, and Jeremiah to warn them. But the Israelites did not change their behavior, so God then called on the prophets Habakkuk, Obadiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel to advise His people of the consequences of their actions. Their prophecies are detailed in the books of the Bible, but for our purposes here, the three most notable prophets are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was born between 650 and 645 BC in a small village just outside of Jerusalem. He was groomed from the beginning for holy service in the priesthood.

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a youth';
for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.
Do not be afraid of them,