

Hire SWANS and let them swim



You're in charge, but that doesn't mean you must have all the answers. It's better if you surround yourself with people who are smarter than you. The return on investment will be extraordinary.

Irv Shapiro is CEO of DialogTech, a Chicago-based firm that he formed in 2005. A serial entrepreneur, Shapiro has developed a recruiting strategy to attract employees with four basic attributes.

Shapiro looks for what he calls SWANs (smart, work hard, ambitious, nice). Job candidates with all these qualities rise to the top of his list.

He came up with this recipe for recruiting success after launching his previous company, Metamor Technology. As the firm surged to 500 employees over 12 years, he sought a consistent way to convey his hiring preferences. So he used the SWAN acronym to summarize what he valued most in people.

Smart, ambitious individuals express strong opinions about how they can maximize their contribution. Their independent streak can produce innovative breakthroughs.

Shapiro admits that SWANs may "pursue their own paths" and that "it can feel like herding cats" to lead a motley crew of hard-charging nonconformists. He says that the CEO must articulate a shared vision that rivets everyone's attention on what matters most to the organization.

It helps to align your leadership with the traits that SWANs possess. Because they are smart and eager to work hard, for example, give them autonomy. Don't micromanage them or insist that they work certain hours.

— Adapted from ["Leadership Lessons: Irv Shapiro, CEO of DialogTech,"](#) Nicole Fallon Taylor.