

You Can't Send a Duck to Eagle School...

And Other Simple Truths of Leadership

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Introduction

A few years ago I had lunch with a top executive from a company known for their legendary retail service. My wife and I are both huge fans, and over lunch I shared with him some of the great service stories his people had provided the Anderson family. I said, "With the service your people give... you must have a training manual 2 inches thick." He looked up and said, "Mac, we don't have a training manual. What we do is find the best people we can find and we empower them to do whatever it takes to satisfy the customer." *Then he said something I'll never forget. He said, "We learned a long time ago that you can't send a duck to eagle school." "Excuse me," I said. He repeated... "You can't send a duck to eagle school." He said, "You can't teach someone to smile, you can't teach someone to want to serve, you can't teach personality. What we can do, however, is hire people who have those qualities and we can then teach them about our products and teach them our culture."*

As long as I live I will never forget this simple analogy about hiring people. It is branded on my brain forever. And since that day, with every hiring decision I've made, I find myself asking the question: *"Am I hiring a duck thinking they will become an eagle?" I can also honestly say that asking this simple question has saved me from making some important hiring mistakes. I just wish I'd heard it 20 years sooner.*