

# A Simple Hack To Build A High-Performance Workforce

Normalize growth and excellence for  
your whole team



 By **Ben Marcovitz**

Whether you're leading a business that's [struggling to recover since the pandemic](#), or growing one of the many [startups](#) that have sprung up over the past year, hiring and retaining top talent is perhaps the single most strategic lever for turning modest, or even meager, resources into outstanding results.

At the same time, it's also an aspect of running a business that many executives take for granted or even delegate completely. It's not difficult to see why — recruitment, hiring and talent development can be time-consuming, not to mention the [lasting impact](#) making the wrong hire can have on your company's



finances and morale. But as a leader accountable for the success of your organization, you ultimately own the results of the hiring process, for better or for worse.

So how can you ensure quality hires for the success of your business, especially when you're short on time, budget and need result fast? While there's no guarantee you'll always make the perfect hire, there is a way to ensure you'll get the very best results out of those you do bring onboard: by making the pursuit of excellence the norm in your company culture.

### **Creating an Aspirational Identity of Excellence**

As any experienced school teacher will tell you, not everyone is a top performer right out of the gate, but those with the right mindset and motivation can improve by leaps and bounds. We call these *rapid growers* – and this is the behavioral standard you want each employee to aspire to from day one.

Use this three-step process to build an aspirational identity that you can use to shape even the least motivated and skilled employees into top performers.

**Step 1:** Name the top three rapid growers on your team, either currently or from the past. Those who really push past obstacles to achieve excellence, stand apart from the pack and *shine*. Picture them walking through their workdays, and list 10-15 simple, concrete, replicable behaviors they exhibit.

**Step 2:** Name three to five team members who are simply not cutting it, and identify the single most important behavior each could change to really turn things around. For example, one may need to take more responsibility, while another should improve their follow through. List them out.

**Step 3:** Use these two lists to create three to five key “We Always” and “We Never” statements for your organization. (For example, “This is who we are. We always...” or “That’s *not* who we are. We never...”

This master list of behaviors is the aspirational identity for your culture. Once you've solidified it, use it to inform your hiring, onboarding and employee motivation strategies.

### **Hiring Differently**

Great leaders build their expectations of performance into the hiring process. Map each candidate's traits to the key behaviors in your aspirational identity, and then give candidates the opportunity to *actively choose those behaviors*.

#### **To accomplish this:**

- Set the tone from day one. Interview candidates with one or more of your top performers who go above and beyond. Show them what the baseline looks like on your team.
- Instead of focusing so much on what candidates say in the interview focus on how they *behave*. Anyone competent enough to get the job is competent enough to tell you exactly what you want to hear in your hiring process.

- Give candidates the good, bad, and ugly about the company and the role, as well as behavioral expectations – then, ask them to opt-in or out. Those who opt-in will be “inoculated” to the major landmines of your work and committed to the identity of the organization.

This way, candidates are eyes-wide-open and energetically choosing the behaviors and mindsets that will make them successful, which not only saves weeks of wasted time on a potentially bad hire, but also creates a culture of commitment to high expectations.

## Onboarding Differently

New hires are incredibly impressionable, so continue to reinforce who they’ve chosen to be in the onboarding process.

Start by exposing them to positive peer pressure, using your aspirational identity as a guide. Carefully select top performers and have them recount instances when they had to choose those aspirational behaviors to get things done. Curate a set of emails showing off your best team members, print them out, and use them as part of your onboarding handbook for new hires.

Stories from peers are stickier than concepts. By showcasing these examples of excellence, new teammates will see a person who is no different from them, who faces the same challenges and opportunities, and who succeeds through the specific behaviors and mindsets, you’ve identified. They will continue to draw on these stories for guidance when tackling daily obstacles on the job.

## Recognizing and Rewarding Daily

As a leader, it’s up to you to continually make behavioral expectations explicit to all employees, long past the onboarding process. Tell legends of successful teammates and the specific choices they made. Make their names into verbs. By translating “who we are” into specific, real-life, in-your-face examples, you create an armada of motivated team members who will push themselves, not just to grow and achieve results, but to *fit in* – and to possibly become legends themselves one day.

In addition, schedule time in your week to regularly acknowledge the behaviors of individuals that meet or exceed expectations, both privately and publicly. Take 20 minutes to sit down with your master list of key behaviors and ask yourself, “Which team member exhibited these behaviors this week?” Then, send an email naming the behavior and thanking them for it. It doesn’t even have to be praise. You simply have to say that *you noticed it* for someone to change their expectations for themselves, set a new bar, and forever push to achieve higher outcomes.

Before you hit send on an email, consider making the recognition more public. When the whole team hears it, it’s like a stream of recipes for how to emulate success from the example of a peer.

After all, human beings calibrate their behavior to what’s normal. If you can make even the most extraordinary behaviors seem ubiquitous throughout your organization, you can normalize growth and excellence for your whole team.

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**Benjamin Marcovitz** is a champion for growth, a leadership expert and the Founder and CEO of the Rise Institute, which advances the understanding that human beings can grow and develop beyond their estimations, and that expecting radical growth from those who struggle can and should be the norm. Using his expertise in consulting work, background in education and boots-on-the-ground research on human behavior, Marcovitz helps leaders accelerate their work and generate breakthrough performance in their employees. He believes the world will be transformed if people understand and recognize the possibilities for growth within everyone.



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