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The Wrong People on the Bus.



By Tommy Lee

Six signs your team needs a change.

I recently sat in a room and listened to David Green, the founder of Hobby Lobby, talk about leadership. He started the company with a small loan in his garage, and he built it into one of the largest privately held retailers in the country.



With David Green, founder of Hobby Lobby, at his office.

One thing he said really stuck with me: you get the right people on the bus by not having the wrong people on the bus.

It sounds simple, but it is hard to do. Most of us put our energy into recruiting great people. A lot fewer of us deal with the person who is already on the team and holding everyone back.

The bus idea comes from Jim Collins and his book *Good to Great*. Collins found that the leaders of great companies decided who before they decided what. They got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off, and the right people in the right seats. Then they figured out where to drive. What David Green said reminded me that the second part, getting the wrong people off, matters just as much as the first.

Why the wrong person will cost you

One wrong person doesn't just do poor work. It affects the whole team.

Your best people notice who gets away with what. When a leader puts up with a bad attitude or poor work, the strongest people on the team decide the standards here don't really matter. Some of them lower their effort to match. Others start looking for another job. Keeping the wrong person often means losing the right ones.

Six signs you have the wrong people on the bus

1. You have to manage them closely

Collins said the right people don't need to be tightly managed. If you find yourself checking every task, repeating the same instructions, or following up on things that should already be done, pay attention to that. You should be giving direction, not babysitting.

2. They don't share your core values

Skills can be taught. Character and values mostly can't. Someone can be very talented and still be wrong for your team if they don't believe what you believe about integrity, serving others, and how people should be treated. If someone keeps pushing back on your values, sooner or later they will push back on the mission too.

3. Your best people avoid working with them

Watch where your strongest team members go. If they work around one person, leave that person off projects, or get quiet when that name comes up, they are telling you something.

4. It is never their fault

Every team misses sometimes. What matters is what happens next. The right people own it and fix it. If someone always blames the client, the system, the timeline, or another teammate, that is a problem with taking responsibility. If there is always an excuse, that is a warning sign as well.

5. They are only there for the paycheck

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be paid for your time. But when someone is only there for the paycheck, it shows. They do the minimum, they watch the clock and only do what is expected of them, and they don't really care where the team is going.

6. You wouldn't hire them again

This is the simplest test, and Collins gives an example of it. Ask yourself, if this person resigned today, would I be disappointed or relieved? If I were hiring for this role tomorrow, would I hire them again? If the honest answer is relieved, or no, you probably already know what you need to do.

What to do about it

Seeing the signs is the easy part. Doing something about it is harder, and it needs to be done with grace.

- **Check the seat before you blame the person.** Collins talks about the right people in the right seats. Sometimes a good person is just in the wrong role, and moving them is what they need.
- **Have the honest, *direct* conversation early.** Don't wait months hoping it gets better. Tell them the truth and be specific.
- **Give them a real chance with a clear deadline.** Tell them what needs to change, what good looks like, and by when. Then follow through either way.
- **Help them land well.** Treat them with dignity. How you handle someone leaving tells everyone who stays what kind of leader you are.

Every person has real worth. At the same time, I am responsible for taking care of the team and the mission God has given me. Their worth doesn't come from their job, and it doesn't come from being on my team. That frees me to be honest with them and still treat them with love, even when the right thing is to help them find a seat on a different bus. But you do have to be willing to have a direct and honest conversation about it.

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