

# 7 Traits Of Truly Sensational Startup Employees

(posted 12/9/14 by Dharmesh Shah, CTO and Co-Founder at HubSpot)

While you might think a great employee is a great employee no matter where she works, what matters in a small, growth-oriented startup is often very different from what matters in a huge, stability-oriented corporation.

For one thing, the ability to successfully navigate politics-filled waters is usually a lot less important in a startup. Plus, since the organizations tend to be flatter, standing out is often more a matter of what you accomplish than of whom you know.

(But then again I love startups and I love startup cultures... so I'm probably biased.)

I've been in an around startups for a long time and known some great startup folks (including many that work at HubSpot). I think I have a sense for what makes for truly sensational people at a startup.

Here's my (partial) list:

## 1. They would much rather act than deliberate.

I've only written one business plan in my life. It was while I was in business school, and it was required. Generally, I think business plans are pretty useless (but the planning *process* can be quite useful).

The problem with business plans is that things change so quickly in the startup world. Before the ink is even dry on that 100+ page business plan as it shoots out the printer, things have already changed and "the plan" is already outdated. Stuff happens: Good stuff, bad stuff -- and every now and then, *amazing* stuff.

Very few startups I know – or companies I've invested in – resemble their original business plan. (And that's a good thing, because it means they're shaping their businesses to meet the needs of their customers.)

Great startup employees are the same way. They think a little and then do a lot. And then they adapt and modify.

The best companies often don't start with a brilliant idea, they *iterate* into one.

It's hard to learn from thinking. It's much easier to learn from doing.

## 2. They don't care about what's behind the curtain.

In some corporations, offices – and the perceived status that come with them – are everything. A corner office makes you better than someone with a hallway office. A hallway office makes you better than someone in a cubicle.

(At my company I don't have an office – I'm not sure what that makes me.)

Startups generally avoid politics. Instead of obsessing who has the bigger desk/office, they obsess over the customer.

Sensational start-up employees understand calories are best spent making a real difference for customers. Every business has finite resources. The key is to spend as much of those resources as possible on things that matter to the customers -- or, at least *genuinely* matter to the team. Fretting over trivial things doesn't help anyone. It's just a waste of energy.

### **3. They don't see money as the solution to every problem.**

Sure, capital-intensive ventures that require extensive investment may need significant cash to get going, but most businesses require little funding to get started. (A quick glance at the Inc. 5000 list shows just how many startups were founded with relatively little funding.)

One of the key lessons first-time entrepreneurs need to learn is *resourcefulness*. How do you take limited resources and turn them into something remarkable?

That's also true of the best startup employees. They're *remarkably resourceful*. They're not looking to build an army of people to do their bidding. They're not looking to spend thousands on advertising to avoid the hard work of writing a blog. They're constantly looking for creative ways to make the most of the resources they have.

In short, they throw brains at problems, not money. And the solutions they come up with are almost always better. And, the connections built between people from solving problems creatively are some of the strongest connections that can be built.

### **4. They see every customer as an individual that deserves respect.**

Maybe you have hundreds or thousands of customers. If so, that's awesome – but that also can mean you face the danger of thinking of your customers as a nameless, faceless group of revenue-producing entities.

But no matter how many customers you have, each is an individual. The day you start thinking of them as this amorphous "collection" and stop thinking of them as people is the day you start going out of business.

Great startup employees never lose sight of the fact that every customer is a person: a person with hopes, dreams, expectations, needs... and a person who ultimately wants to be treated as a person. Yes, they worry about the "market" and work to build a business that can scale as it grows. But, that's shouldn't be an excuse for not caring about customers.

Great startup employees solve for the customer – and in so doing, they solve for the business.

### **5. They *love* a meritocracy.**

Sensational startup employees hate politics. They hate hidden agendas. They hate the “good old boys” network.

They’re willing to succeed on their own merits – because they believe in themselves. And they believe in others, too.

### **6. They care much more about their peers than the perks.**

Catered meals. Free massages. Lavish parties. These are all perks -- and they're great if you have them. But, the best people care *much* more about who they work with (their peers) than the perks they get.

This is for a very simple reason: The #1 benefit of working at a startup is that you get to *learn*. And, how much you learn is largely a function of how much autonomy you have -- and who you're around.

Also, stars know intuitively that life is short. Too short to work with people you don't enjoy.

### **7. They instinctively focus on the company’s mission.**

Walk through any huge corporation and you’ll find people who have created their own jobs (and not in a good way.)

Some will have developed databases filled with data (but resulting in no usable insight) because they love building databases. Some will have created fancy charts (again resulting in no usable insight) because they love creating fancy charts. Some will schedule meeting after meeting (none of which resulting in meaningful decisions) because they love being in charge... and they love hearing themselves talk.

Great start-up employees focus on the core mission of the company. They build products customers want. They meet customer needs. They help other employees succeed. The best people don't just bide their time while they're at work. They squeeze as much value out of that time as they possibly can in furthering the organization's mission.

They try to make tomorrow better than today for everyone around them – because *that’s* what they love to do.

**By the way...**If you found yourself nodding your head a bunch while reading this article, you should check careers at HubSpot. We're *constantly* looking for people with these traits. (We're a public company now, but have the soul of a startup).

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