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Fall Event Speaker News: Inc. Editor Leigh Buchanan Gets Robert Sutton to Question Jim Collins

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One of the employee retention tips I mention most often here, based on its success rate at our award-winning small and mid-sized businesses, is hiring for attitude and fit – even over skills – to keep the atmosphere of team building strong and, thus, your workplace culture productive. Owners and leaders of these companies report that hiring in this way helps keep turnover low, and it also provides a better base for promoting from within.

In addition to picking one thing and doing it well from a product/service/branding point of view, getting the right people on the bus is pure Jim Collins. Yet, Stanford University management professor Robert Sutton, author of his own bestseller *The No Asshole Rule* (read our review of it) and the just-released *Good Boss, Bad Boss*, says employees' personal motivations trump hiring for fit.

In the October issue of Inc. Magazine, Editor at Large Leigh Buchanan – who will speak at our October 27-29 event with Inc. in Denver – asks Sutton if it's harder for bosses at small companies to manage, given that their reports tend to range from the highest down to the lowest level. Sutton replies that

It is harder. Because the people you oversee will have different motivations. With all due respect, this is where Jim Collins is full of shit. I have a friend whose family bought a chain of movie theaters. Maybe all that get-the-right-people-on-the-bus stuff applies to the managers of those multiplexes. But a couple levels down, you're dealing with teenagers who are going to be in the job for a year or less. My friend said there are four things you want those people to do: show up to work, look decent, not make out or get stoned while they're on the job, and not steal. If you can find people like that, you have a successful business.

What do you think about Sutton's response? I have two observations:

1. Today the *Kansas City Star* highlights an ominous statistic from the September unemployment report: barely more than one-quarter of teens have a job. With this level of job insecurity, will teens who secure work act more like adults and curb their behavior along the lines of what Sutton says his business-owner friend sees at the lowest level? My guess is yes, and if this is true, this would create a work environment where more of these folks are prone to drinking the motivational Kool-Aid for fear of losing their job.
2. I also think Sutton's repudiation of Jim Collins when it comes to hiring for fit doesn't give leaders enough credit. Just among Winning Workplaces' award winners, Phelps County Bank in Missouri [Buy Accutane](#) and Gentle Giant Moving in Massachusetts illustrate that you can create a workplace that entices teens to come on board *and* motivates them to stay on and look for increased responsibility as young adults. It can and does happen, irrespective of industry or location as the aforementioned two examples show.

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