

## Management: Great Follies in American Business – the “Great-Uncle” Technique

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There is an ancient, and not particularly well-known, martial art technique known as the “Great-Uncle Technique.” This technique originated several hundred years ago and involved waiting patiently for Great-Uncle to show up and deal with any aggressors. Despite the frequency with which the Great-Uncles failed to show up, the technique never quite disappeared.

A slightly modified form of Great-Uncle Technique later surfaced in America. This time, it involved waiting for an unknown great-uncle to die in order to inherit his wealth. This technique proved extremely effective, with the exception of those occasions in which either there was no great-uncle or he had no wealth. The technique survived in modern United States when it was picked up by American businesses.

Within the context of American Business, the infamous “Great Uncle” is the recruiter, friend of the company, and/or investor that sends highly qualified, enthusiastic job applicants, a perfect match for their job openings, on a regular basis.

At the most egregious extreme application of the technique one can find the modern American company that tries to cheat recruiters. Not long ago one such company came up with the brilliant realization that if a recruiter provided a resume with no contact information, it was not that hard to locate the person independently of the recruiter. They would tell the recruiter “no thanks,” and then contact the prospect on their own. After a couple rounds of this behavior, only the Great-Uncle would send them qualified candidates. Of course just like in martial arts, the resumes never materialized and the company eventually went under.

Fortunately, most businesses are not acting dishonestly. However, they often behave in ways that reminds me of the “Great Uncle” behaviors of past martial art generations. Let’s face it, finding the right talent is a very difficult task. The right talent can make the difference between a failing startup and one that goes public. That is why so often the Venture Capital community will insist on an experienced team before taking out the check book. However, if you are a company that insists on the application of the “Great Uncle” technique as a business tool for recruiting, then we have some good suggestions for you:

\* **Skip the website.** Why waste money putting up a website, to say nothing of the time it takes to write the content? After all, no one ever looks at a website to find out about more about a company advertising openings. Sure, having no website, or a “We are in stealth-mode” website may reduce people’s trust but what is that compared to the sense of mystery and excitement created thereby?

\* **Don’t provide contact information.** There’s nothing like an anonymous email address with no clue whether the company is in Boston or Burbank to encourage people to move on to other possibilities.

\* **Don’t provide management bios.** Nothing is quite as exciting as taking a risk on an unknown company whose management is unwilling to reveal their identities.

\* **Use the same description as everyone else.** Based on the companies I talk to, every business in the greater Boston area and Silicon Valley is an “exciting, dynamic, fun place to work,” and a place where “we work hard and play hard.” They’re also only hiring the top people in the field. Most likely company location: Lake Woebegone.

\* **Encourage employees to bring in people from their personal networks.** This is a dangerous technique in that it sometimes works. Assuming that your employees have a large enough network this can result in some strong hires. However, the risk that it will backfire or produce very little result, since everyone else is encouraging their employees to do the same thing, means that it merits inclusion in this list.

\* **Don’t use recruiters.** Don’t think of talent acquisition as an investment in your company, just think of it as an expense to be minimized. You don’t need to pay anything to get the best people, Great-Uncle will send them through the door. Lottery tickets are also a good way to fund the business.

\* **Don’t develop clear job descriptions or hiring metrics.** If you are going to use a recruiter, you want to make sure you can blame them if the new hires don’t work out.

As you can see, depending upon Great-Uncle can save a lot of time and expense. While his work is neither timely nor even guaranteed, when Great-Uncle does come through, he can come through big. But for those who are impatient with his pace, moving forward with such elements as a clear, easy-to-navigate website, easy to find contact information, information about management and the company, a vivid description of what the company is doing and what makes it unique, and clearly defined job descriptions and hiring metrics can significantly speed up the process of finding and retaining not just top talent, but the best talent for your company.

Good luck!

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