LEADERSHIP LESSONS
GROW YOUR OWN

Hire for Potential and Train Up

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Zivtech
OPEN SOURCE Digital Innovation

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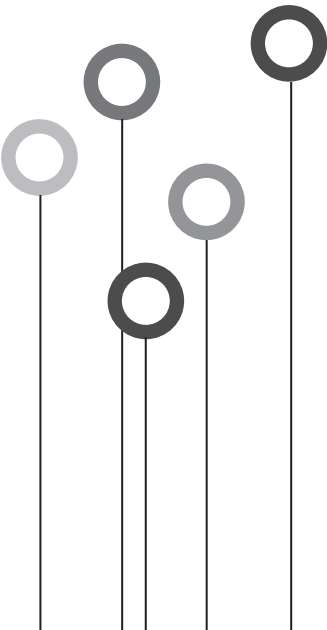
INTRODUCTION

Lack of available talent is a common refrain of business owners. Give up on looking and complaining! Learn how to create a sustainable business.

IN THIS WHITE PAPER, LEARN HOW TO:

- Stop looking and start teaching
- Achieve human-centered business management
- Boost engagement and create a cohesive team

Growing your own means hiring smart, motivated people with all the right soft skills and investing in them for the long haul. In return for their careers, they'll reward you with loyalty, teach your newer staff, and work in unison with a cohesive vision.

Invest in your people to invest in your business.

WHERE *is the* TALENT?

There are so many intelligent people out there who would thrive with a little help.
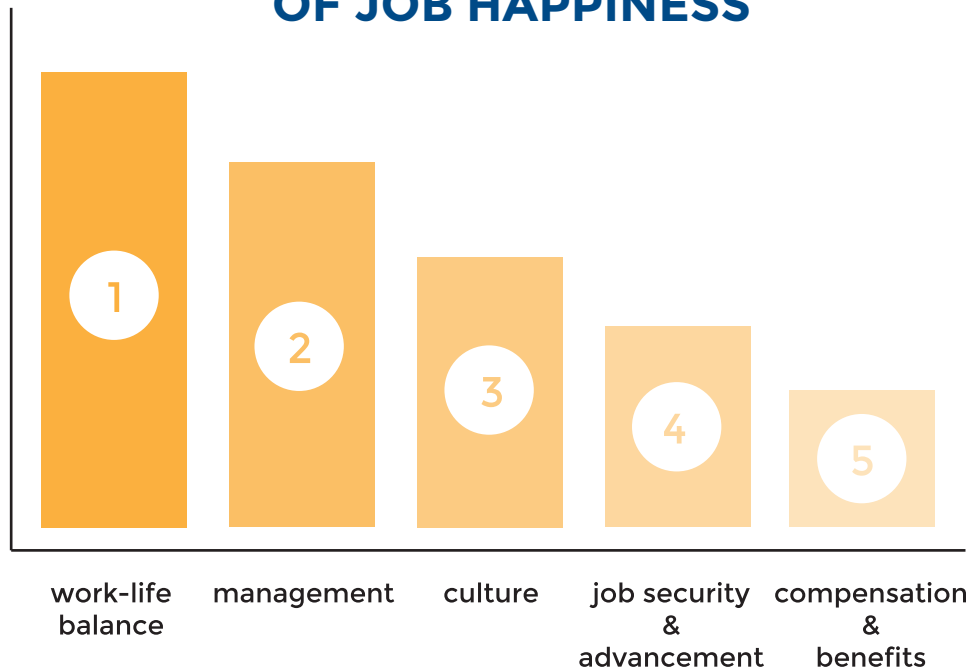
It's not realistic to imagine that you live in a world where there are people that you can just hire for a decent price who already have all the skills you need. Just come in, hit the ground running, and make you a bunch of money. You wouldn't have any problems with them, and you wouldn't have to do much for them other than feed them some pizza and pay them.

So when managers can't find those people, they get upset, and they say, "There's not enough talent. People are not getting educated properly. We don't have the right people and the right programs out there."

The world is full of talent! No, they haven't learned the specific skills that you need, but there are so many intelligent people out there who would thrive with a little help.

RANKING THE ELEMENTS OF JOB HAPPINESS

1. work-life balance
2. management
3. culture
4. job security & advancement
5. compensation & benefits

*SOURCE: http://blog.indeed.com/hiring-lab/indeed-job-happiness-index-2016/

When I started working in software development, I saw myself as someone who made websites. That was my output: I was making websites, or I was making code. Over the years now I see that my product is people. I'm selling their time, expertise, knowledge, and human capacity.

In web development, who cares about the code when you have the coder? It's like the egg and the chicken. You have to take care of the chicken, and not each little egg, because the chickens just keep making more.

Being a great website maker isn't really that valuable. What is really valuable is being able to grow more people who can do the work. Then you really scale up. You're only going to do so well as a solo practitioner. If you're able to grow more and more skilled people, not only is your business doing better, but you start to realize that the task of training people is more important than building websites.
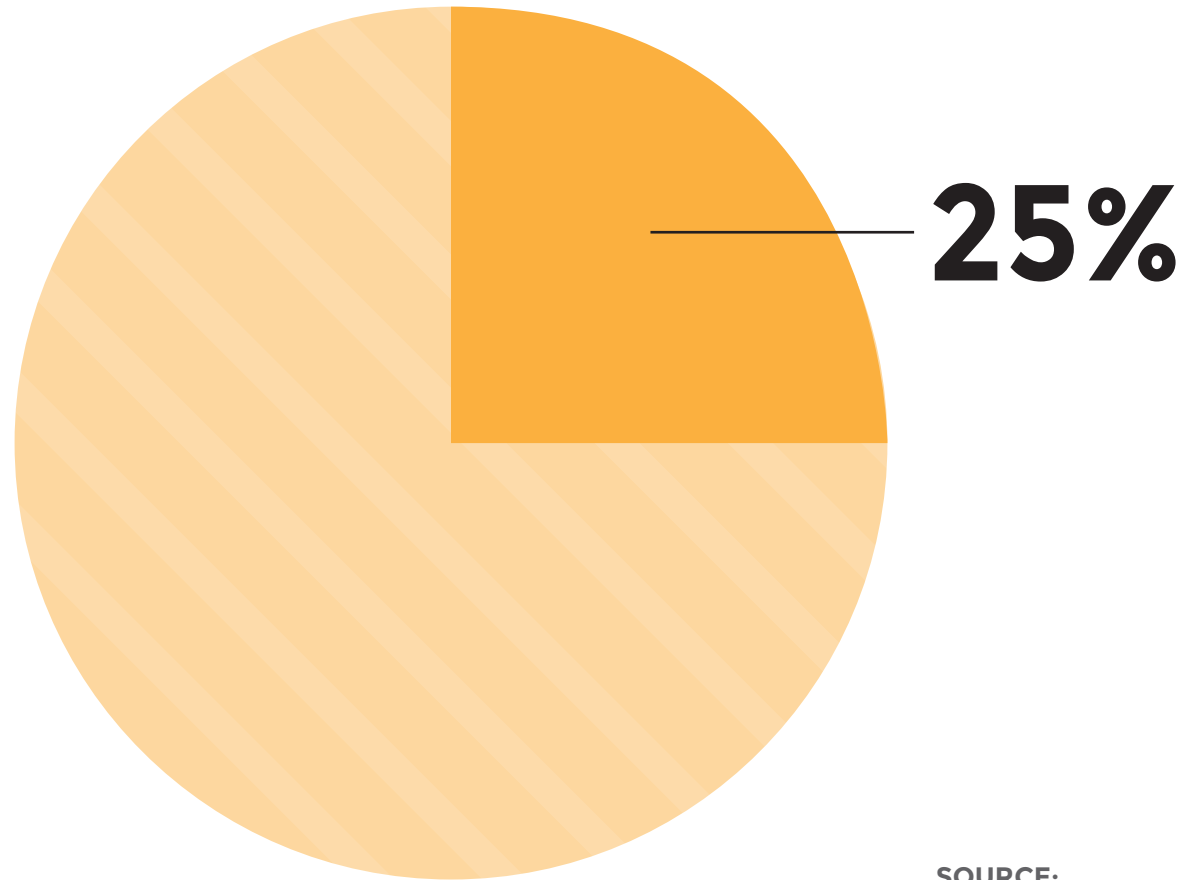
WHAT
are your
VALUES?

What really matters? People. I see our staff get married, have children, buy houses, enjoy their lives, their coworkers, and their working environment, and know that I was a part of that. They also created our value.

What really matters? People.

PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES WHO FEEL THEY HAVE HIGH LEVELS OF GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

25%

Early on we adopted this idea that we were going to train up our people, and that we weren't going to just expect them to come in all ready to go. We were going to bring people in at all different levels including having no experience at all. Over the years we found that we gained a lot from doing that, so we have much better employee retention than most of our peers. A lot of our people have been here almost since our start.

Our team is very close, and communicates very well. Think of a team as neurons in your brain. The more connections that they have, the better they communicate, the stronger the team.

They are harmonious because they've all been trained in the same way. We don't have a lot of strong conflicts about how we do things. All of our projects are done in the same way.

WHAT *you* GAIN

People give you retention, loyalty, and generosity because you gave them something.

We're not undoing old opinions, and we also have a lot of generosity towards each other. People give you retention, loyalty, and generosity because you gave them something. You took a chance on them when they didn't have a lot of opportunities, and you invested a lot in them. We also have a lot of developers with other strengths. They are more well-rounded. Our staff includes people with many outside skills, including musicians, artists, writers and polyglots. Their diverse cognitive frameworks help solve problems creatively.

In a culture of training, everyone values the idea of working together to teach each other. That extends not just to our own team, but to how we interact with our clients. Ultimately I find that clients often value being taught more than they value the end product.

We have a team of great communicators who value teaching. Whether they're the project manager, the developer, or the QA person, they're always finding that chance to teach the client something.

> In a culture of training, everyone values the idea of working together to teach each other.
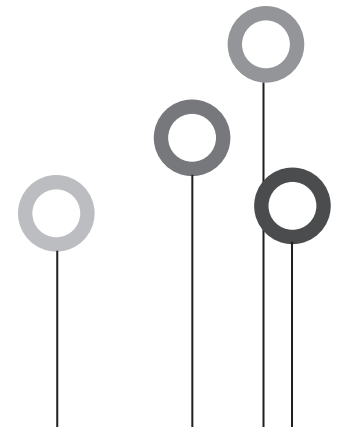
PERCENT OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT IDENTIFY CULTURE AND ENGAGEMENT AS A TOP CHALLENGE

87%
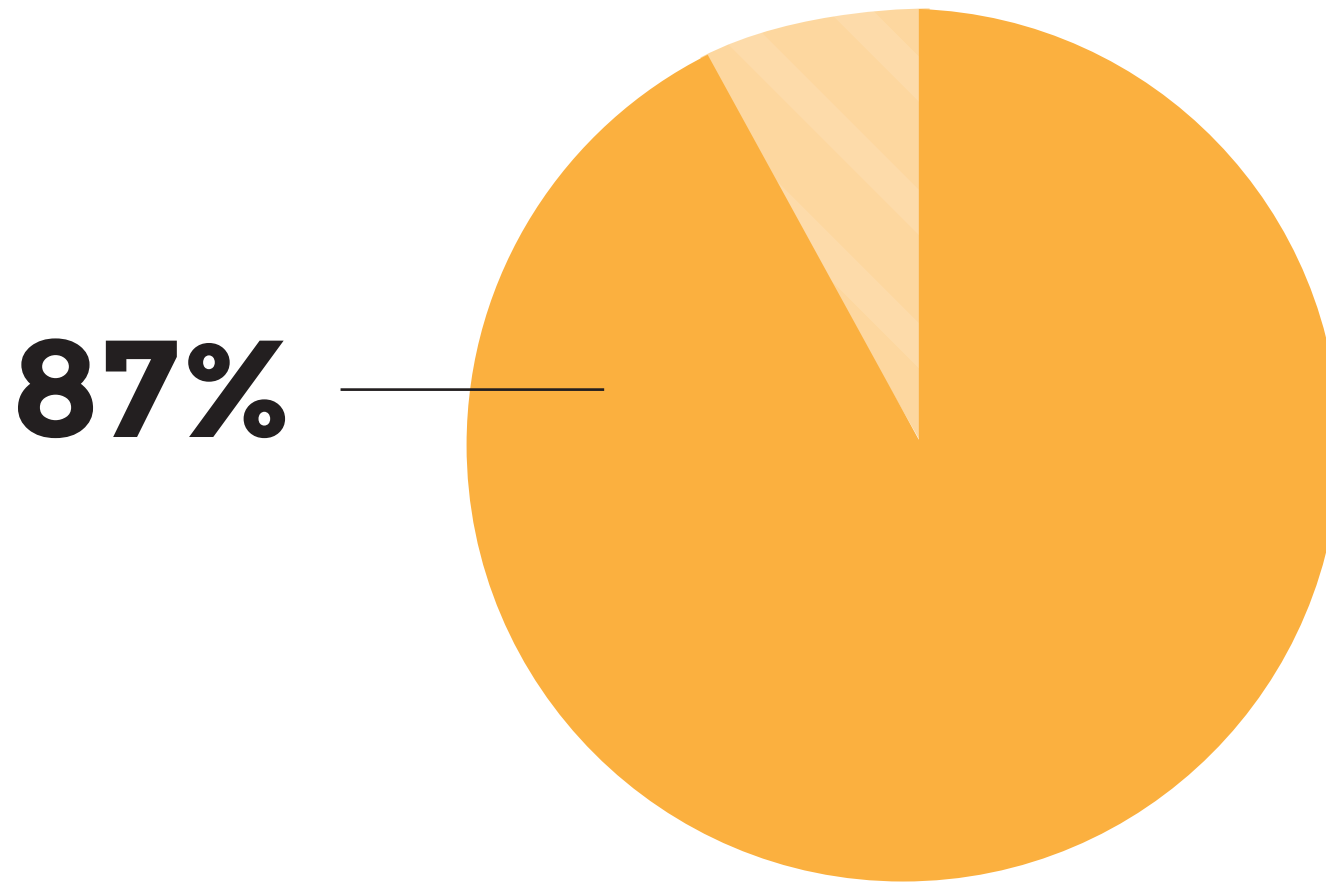
HOW WE STARTED
GROWING A BUSINESS
from seed

We got started with this idea out of necessity, as well as from personal values. I had a few different careers before I got into this. I was a pharmaceutical chemist, and I was also a math teacher. But I never worked at a place where anyone recognized my talent.

I had other jobs, too. In college, I was a telemarketer and did data entry. I was a bright person, but nobody seemed to notice. I always thought that it was a shame that talent goes to waste due to a lack of opportunity for young, unproven workers.

Back then, I wished someone would have given me an opportunity to do something at my level.

Instead I made it happen for myself, and co-founded this company in 2008. We didn't have any money, and back then there were even fewer qualified potential hires in our field. I'm super picky about the quality of the work my company does, and wasn't willing to hire second rate workers.

We hired a few people and then the economy collapsed. Much of our work went away. We decided that we weren't going to cut anybody. By that point, we'd hired four or five people, and they didn't really have any experience. I was doing most of the billable work, plus teaching people. When the workload dwindled, we decided to just pay them from our credit cards. About half of those people are still with us, and they're doing great. I'm really glad that we kept them.

The main reason that we started hiring people who didn't really have much or any experience was that we couldn't afford anyone who did. We're not a virtual company; we've always had an office, so we're limited to our local area, and there really were very few good developers. Instead what we did was just bring candidates into the office, make sure everyone communicated, and for our part, we would bring a willingness to teach.

Believe that your people are intelligent, and that you can teach them something, and that they can learn. They might not learn as quickly as you would like some sometimes, but if you believe that they will learn, they will.
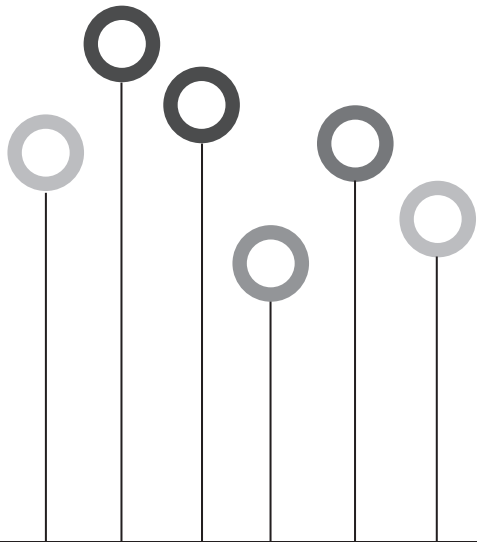
TOP WORK ENGAGMENT DRIVERS

#1 Belief in Senior Leadership

#2 Growth & Development

*SOURCE: http://www.modernsurvey.com/fall2014

TRAINING *as an* INVESTMENT

When you start with untrained staffers, they are not billing very many hours, and they're also taking a lot of time from people who would be billing.

You're constantly having this feeling of, "Oh God, I don't have time to help you. I have to get my work done." You have to fight that and say, "Do you know what? Helping you is more important than getting my work done." Getting work done is short-term money. Teaching someone is long-term. You have to find the balance because you have to keep the money coming in, but everyone on your team must understand that training people up is the highest priority.

It's not just a distraction slowing you down from getting your work done. It is the whole future of the company.

> Getting work done is short-term money. Teaching someone is long-term.
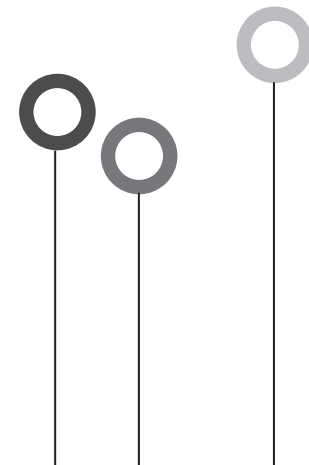
ON-RAMPS *to* SUCCESS

We found a lot of different ways that we can have employees bill and learn as they are gaining experience.

One way is quality assurance, or QA. Having staff perform testing gets them in the mix of the whole project. They are moving through the tickets; they are testing everything. They are passing things up to the client.

Documentation is another task that we can have less experienced people tackle. We're lucky enough to have a client that now comes to us just for technical documentation, and writing technical documentation is something that a smart, logical, technical, college educated person can do without five years of development experience. In the process they are learning.

We have them make training materials. You don't have to be an expert to write automated tests. In the process, you get a lot more involved in the mix of a software project.

## PERCENTAGE OF THE GLOBAL WORKFORCE THAT FEELS HIGHLY ENGAGED

13%

SOURCE:
http://www.gallup.com/poll/165269/
worldwide-employees-engaged-work.aspx

"Believe that your people are intelligent, and that you can teach them something, and that they can learn."

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Project oembed contains 7 modules: oembedfield, oembedprovider,
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panelizer-7.x-3.x-dev downloaded. [ok]
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QUALITY
first

With all these brand new people, how do you make sure that quality remains high? I'm obsessed with quality; my worst nightmare is low quality work going out to our clients. But quality is all about process and communication. We've created review techniques that ensure junior staff members are safe to make mistakes. That review process provides constant feedback. People learn pretty quickly not to make the same mistake again.
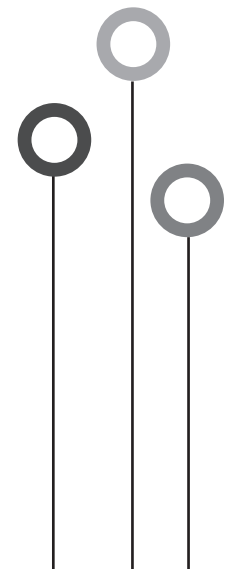
How we work is we teach, and we learn, and we teach, and we learn.

In the summer of 2014, we did our own developer boot camp. We got a grant from the City of Philadelphia.

The people who applied for the boot camp were much more diverse than the people who usually apply for tech jobs. We didn't try to have women and minorities in our boot camp; it was a diverse application pool. They were mostly recent college grads; some were still in college, and some didn't have a tech background. There were science and humanities majors. They were starting to see the writing on the wall.

The boot camp was a six week course. It was amazing to see how hard they worked. Some were going to be more backend, some more front end, and some would be better project managers. All different skills, and we hired some people, which was another reason for doing it.

HOW FORMAL
is your
TRAINING?

There's no better way to see how good potential hires are than to train them and work with them over a period of time.

Find out who is reliable, who learns quickly, and who communicates well. Then hire the star students. I helped others get jobs in other companies. What we do is a trade, and you need to go through an apprenticeship to really be good.

It's hard to make time for your people when you're a leader. You are going from meeting to meeting, and everyone's running up on you, and there are a thousand emails. I tell myself, "None of that is as important as what someone's asking me right now." They're not always asking me technical questions. Sometimes they're asking me how to deal with a client, or sometimes they talk about their personal lives.

The most important thing I need my people to learn is not how to be a great developer. The most important thing for them to learn is to value training people. When they value training people, they can train more people.

If all they do is learn to be a great developer, I'll get some value out of them. If they learn to teach everyone around them, and to grow up the next generation that we hire, that's a lot more value. Luckily, teaching is a really great way to learn.

How we work is we teach, and we learn, and we teach, and we learn.

TEACHING *as* LEADERSHIP

As a leader, teaching is the highest ROI activity that you can do. It's not a distraction. You only accomplish what you prioritize; see it as your priority to make time to teach people. If it's your third, fourth, or fifth priority, it's not going to happen. It's got to be your top priority. Make your encouragement obvious.
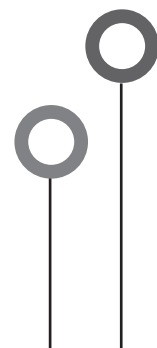
Everyone learns in different ways, so give them encouragement and support them. Talk to them about how it's going, and let them find their own way. You have to let people be individuals. No one's going to be just like you. Find their strengths, and learn how to play to those strengths.

Instead of telling people what to do, provide them with direction, explain your values, and then let them figure out how they fit in.

Believe that people can be extremely valuable. If you support them, and make them feel like they want to be on your side, then they'll give their all instead of just giving what you specifically ask for. You'll never guess what they can really offer.

LET *your people* **GROW**
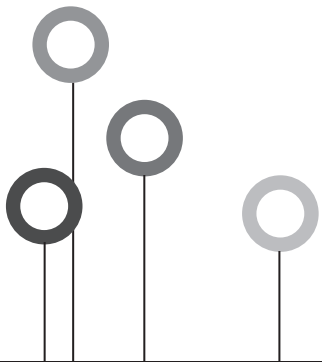
HOW *to* EVALUATE

How do you evaluate really green people if they don't have the technical skills?

Go for the soft skills, because those are hard to teach. Hard skills are relatively easy to teach. Soft skills include how honest and open they are, and how well they communicate. These are things you'll have a really hard time changing. I end up with great developers with great soft skills.

CASE
studies

STEVEN HEISE
SENIOR DEVELOPER

This is a friend of mine, Steve, who started in 2008 as an intern. He's a senior developer now, and one of our top employees. He's been extremely valuable. He had no computer background and doesn't really care about tech that much, but he's awesome at it.

SEAN WOLFE
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Sean started as our designer in 2010. He's a great creative director, but he started with very little experience.
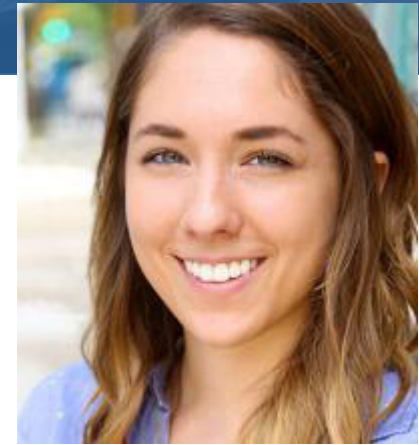
CHRISTINE GERMEROTH
MARKETING COORDINATOR

We move people up in every part of the business. It's not just the development team. This is Christine. She just changed from working as our receptionist to being in marketing.

ALLISON LAW
DEVELOPER

JASON OSCAR
DEVELOPER

LAUREN LEWIS
JR. DEVELOPER

STEPHANIE SEMERVILLE
JR. FRONT END DEVELOPER

These are two people we hired from our boot camp 2014. They had almost no background in the field. Allison is now running a whole team of ours for a pharmaceutical company. Jason is now a lead developer, and he's also running teams.

These are some of our latest hires; they both came from a boot camp nearby, and I have very high hopes for them in the future.

ALUMNI

These people started at Zivtech with little or no experience. We are proud of their careers.

Aaron Couch, Director of Engineering at NuCivic

Tim Plunkett, Solutions Architect at Acquia

Meghan Plunkett, Developer at Stanford

Ryan Gibson, Developer at MediaCurrent

Stephen Haslett, Software Engineer at Mediabistro

Dave Dagino, Developer at Time

Aim to hire people who possess a combination of great soft skills and natural talent. Let them learn the business and give them opportunities to see where they want to go. In return, you'll have a cohesive team of devoted, engaged, and loyal employees.

the
TAKEAWAY
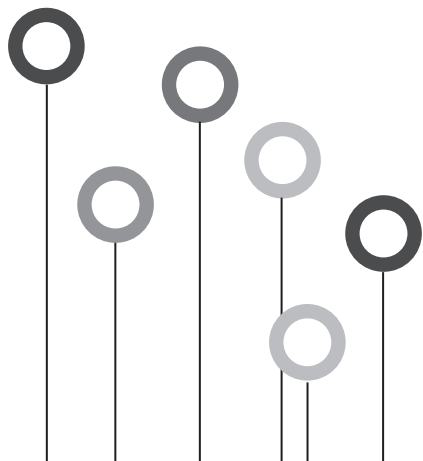
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CTO & CO-FOUNDER

Jody Hamilton is CTO and co-founder of Zivtech, a cutting edge digital agency based in Philadelphia. Jody is an award winning full stack Drupal expert. She handles technical architecture, strategy, development, consulting, and developer training. Jody has worked on hundreds of Drupal projects, and since 2008 has helped grow Zivtech from a Drupal development shop to a full service digital agency. Jody frequently lectures and provides training to an international audience.

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