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HOW HAVING A TRAINING TEAM CHANGED HOW WE DO SUPPORT

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Linode makes clouds with Linux.
- ▶ We have about ~50 Customer Support Specialists, Trust & Safety, and Training Experts on our Support team.
- ▶ We do ~6k tickets and emails and ~3k phone calls/month.

THE SHORT VERSION

- ▶ We were understaffed and didn't have enough candidates, so we had to change the candidate pool.
- ▶ To do that, we had to figure out what we can (or want to) teach vs. what our candidates should already know.
- ▶ We hired a Training Team Lead, made a curriculum and structured training plan, all focused on what we can (or want to) teach.
- ▶ Hired Training Experts for mentorship (and other stuff, too).

THE PROBLEM

- ▶ We were growing way too fast to keep up with staffing. TTFR was way up (although CSAT was still good!)
- ▶ Traditional hiring methods were (mostly) working, but far too slowly. We just couldn't find good people fast enough, even by throwing a ton of money and resources into it.
- ▶ We could hold out forever, and keep drowning - but maybe there's another way.
- ▶ After recruiting, interviewing, and hiring, training was still another ~6 months.

THE CANDIDATES

- ▶ Why is it so hard to find perfect candidates? Maybe they don't exist. Maybe the two big requirements - in our case, Linux (highly technical) and CS (not technical at all) don't overlap that much.
- ▶ Furthermore, even those perfect-on-paper candidates didn't always work out. Maybe those perfect-on-paper people... weren't that perfect.
- ▶ If they don't exist, or if they aren't that great in the first place, maybe it's a better strategy to change who we're looking for and teach them the rest.
- ▶ Out of our two main requirements, what's easier to teach: CS skills, or Linux skills? What's more important?
- ▶ **Our perfect candidate went from "Highly-Technical Linux Expert, Fantastic Customer Service Skills" to "Has probably (maybe) heard of Linux, but definitely knows how computers work, Fantastic Customer Service Skills"**
- ▶ A whole new pool of candidates opened up to us - hobbyists, career changers, students...

THE TRAINING

- ▶ Now we had a new problem: we had to teach our new recruits the other stuff.
- ▶ We're gonna need a FT trainer, PT trainers, a curriculum, and a plan.

THE TRAINING

- ▶ What did our training look like before?
 - ▶ First day: get your accounts and your computer from HR, take a tour, meet your mentor.
 - ▶ Follow a loose training curriculum while your trainer (a Senior Support member) was doing their other job at the same time.
 - ▶ Teach everyone Linux, CS skills, and our systems.
 - ▶ At some point several months in, do a "TBF" day, and then you're onboarded! Good luck!

THE TRAINING

- ▶ What does our training look like now?
 - ▶ One FT Training Team Lead, six or seven PT Training Experts.
 - ▶ A class of new hires start on the first Monday every month. From the moment they arrive on the first day, they're with their Trainer.
 - ▶ Our Training Team Lead has an hour-by-hour training curriculum Monday-Friday, 7a-4p for four weeks, focused on Linux and our systems. Focus on CS, but we don't have to teach it - we hired people who are already CS experts.
 - ▶ Assessments, progress charts, check-ins, guest trainers. Weekly progress updates sent to Managers and Training Experts.
 - ▶ After four weeks, move on to a mentorship, doing the real job with a Training Expert to be your mentor and point of contact.
 - ▶ Once all Core Competencies have been met and all assessments have been passed, you're onboarded! Good luck, but this time, you won't need it.

THE RESULTS

- ▶ *We have completely changed* our candidate pool - we consistently hire three or four quality people *every month*.
- ▶ We can also take bigger chances on people. When you have a structured training program, identifying weaknesses and ensuring proper progress gives you better insight into how well your trainees are going to succeed.
- ▶ Our training time has decreased from some crazy-long period with inconsistent results to 73.3 days with really great, consistent people.
- ▶ When they aren't mentoring, our Training Experts do at least one Lunch & Learn/month, either on a Linode-specific or even only tangentially-related technology topic every month. They're utilized even when not mentoring.
- ▶ Our people and team are the most knowledgable, diverse, interesting, and engaged as they've ever been.
- ▶ Unforeseen side-effect - so much less turnover. People aren't getting bored, they're exposed to something brand new to them, and they're excited to be here.
- ▶ Warning: this took over a year to get right, and we're still working on it. This is really, really, really hard - even with the perfect trainer.

SHAMELESS PLUG

- ▶ We're hiring 😊

THE END

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