

## Hire Wisely: Cookshack Reduces Turnover, Increases Employee Engagement and Morale

[Cookshack](#) is dedicated to helping their customers produce award-winning BBQ with high quality slow smoke food equipment. Founded in 1963 by Gene and Judy Ellis, Gene saw a need for restaurants to have equipment that could slow smoke foods without the challenges associated with a traditional BBQ pit. As a result, his unique and easy-to-use design became highly sought after by restaurants and consumers alike.

Cookshack's rapid growth and high demand for product fast put a lot of pressure on the company. Employees needed to move fast to get product out to the customer as quickly as possible, which unintentionally shifted the culture to focus on speed of product completion as opposed to employee engagement.

### The Challenge

As time went on, the focus on getting product out fast was left unchecked, creating a significant drag on employee engagement and retention. Prior to implementing The Forte Factor's Hire Wisely program in 2016, Cookshack experienced turnover rates of 80-100% and faced turnover of 200-300% in new hires. They had to hire staff quickly to fill the void as employees left, so new employees were hired based on skill alone. This approach cost Cookshack approximately \$50,000 per year in just the hiring process.

The executive team decided that Cookshack had to be a company where high quality products were made by employees who were excited and passionate about their work. To do this, they needed a way to figure out how to hire the right person to improve their turnover rate and reduce the cost of hiring new employees each year.

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### The Solution

In 2016, Cookshack hired Jay Forte to implement The Forte Factor's Hire Wisely program.

"Jay had a process for interviewing people to see if they are a cultural fit; to see if their personality profiles fit the job," said Robbie Powell, HR Specialist at Cookshack.

The Hire Wisely program guides the hiring team in four areas: defining, sourcing, interviewing and onboarding. First, each role was reviewed to define the attributes (strengths, skills and experience) needed to be successful in the role and to advance the organization's performance. With *defining*, Cookshack gained clarity around what success attributes were required for each role, enabling the executive team to source more efficiently and effectively. The attributes summary also helps to identify what needs to be assessed and reviewed in the interview, enabling the creation of effective talent-based questions and job-related activities to have job candidates more successfully share their abilities and skills during an interview. Cookshack also leveraged the Talent and Performance Style assessment as part of their role qualification process, making the process both more effective and efficient.

"It was a lot of work, but it was worth it. Now we know how to interview around the personality profile of a job as opposed to just hiring someone to do the work. It's more than just hiring for skill. We take the time to find the right fit," said Jim Linnebur, plant manager at Cookshack.

## **The Results**

In less than two years, Cookshack experienced dramatic results, including reduction in hiring costs, low turnover, increased efficiencies, and morale, positivity levels and engagement were all up. Specifically:

- Average Annual Turnover rate decreased from 40% in 2016 to 29.79% in 2017 (10.21% improvement)
- Hiring costs in 2016 were approximately \$52,000; hiring costs in 2017 were approximately \$45,000 (\$7,000 in savings)

President and CEO Stewart Powell said that after implementing The Forte Factor's Hire Wisely program, the company's culture is now more appropriately aligned to Cookshack's mission and core values. He said, "Now, we push less to get product built as fast as we did before because our culture has changed to one where people come to work because they want to come to work and, as a result, it's a much happier place."

In 2018, Cookshack received a Top Workplaces Award for Small Businesses in the state of Oklahoma. According to Powell, "I believe our hiring process is partly the reason why we scored high."