

Hiring Innovators: Interview with Matt Di Paola, Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer at MediaCom

By [Seleena Juma](#)

Matt Di Paola joined MediaCom as their Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer earlier this year. MediaCom is one of the world's leading media agencies with 4,600 people working in 116 offices in 89 countries. Matt has interviewed many aspiring professionals in his career and we had the pleasure of sitting down with him to gain some insight on how to hire innovators.

IQP: Do you have an overriding people strategy?

MD: **I am a believer in hiring and rewarding for attitude first and then training for capability.**

When looking for certain behavioural and cultural traits, there are certain key characteristics and personality types that I seek out. I look for people who are entrepreneurial and curious by nature. People who are open to defining their role, who have phenomenal problem solving skills, are not afraid to get their hands dirty and who don't have a lot of ego. In addition, I am a believer in growing your people and investing a lot of time in training and developing them.

IQP: What is the most important step in your hiring process?

MD: The most important step is the detailed briefing at the onset to ensure that the internal and/or external recruiter has a strong understanding of the role and how that role will affect the team and play a part in the larger organization. **The most important step in the hiring process happens before candidates are met.**

IQP: How do you retain top talent?

MD: Being a good listener, being engaged, making sure your team feels supported and that their personal and professional goals are supported. It's really about getting to know your people and making sure that they are getting regular feedback. You must keep people challenged versus just throwing titles and salaries at them. The people you want to retain are the ones who are always looking for new challenges and set new goals and your job as a manager is to support them and create an environment which helps them achieve those goals.

IQP: What are the top three things you look for in a potential employee?

MD: **The number one thing would be insatiable curiosity.** I love people who ask lots of questions. To me, it shows that their brain is engaged and they are trying to find ways to identify and diagnose the problem and subsequently find ways to solve that problem.

Number two is entrepreneurialism. I look for people who don't just do things the same way every time. I'm a firm believer in Einstein's statement about the definition of insanity: doing things the same way but expecting a different result. That holds a lot of truth for me. As the world around us evolves, you've got to be comfortable exploring new ways of doing things and not be afraid to fail.

Number three is a collaborative personality. I am not a fan of people who are individual superstars. I don't like the ego or sense of entitlement that comes with that. I like people who are really self-aware; people who know what they're really good and also know what they're not good at. I like it when people are comfortable reaching out to others and building the right team to accomplish the things they need to accomplish.

IQP: What are your Top 3 Tips for Hiring and Retaining Top Talent?

MD: **1. Make sure you're hiring for skill set + personality type + cultural fit.** You will need people with the right soft skills on the team. Use the big picture approach for sure when hiring and

retaining top talent.

2. Understand people's problem solving capabilities. Understanding how people would approach different challenges gives you insight into who they are and how they think.

3. Commit. If one of your team members has come to you with a request and you say you're going to do something, do it. Actions go a lot further than words so make sure your people feel that you are behind them and are supporting them.

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