

MEDIAKIM

LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

First Who, Then What: Getting the Right People on the Bus

Before you decide where the business is going, decide who is coming with you. The best leaders get the right people on board first — and the strategy follows.

A MEDIAKIM INSIGHTS RESOURCE PACK

Published 4 March 2026

Most leaders set the vision first, then look for people to execute it. Jim Collins found that great companies did it the other way around. They got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off) before they decided exactly where to drive it. Who comes first; what comes second. It is a small reversal with enormous consequences.

> **“Great vision without great people is irrelevant.”**
>
> **— Jim Collins, Good to Great**

Why people before plan

The logic is more robust than it first appears. If you build around a brilliant strategy, you are stuck when the strategy needs to change — which it always does. But if you build around the right people, you can adapt together to whatever comes. The right people do not need to be tightly managed or motivated; they are self-driven by character. The wrong people will undermine even a perfect plan.

Hire for character, train for skill

Especially in a small business, every hire is enormous — one person can shift the whole culture. Skills can be taught; character, integrity and work ethic are far harder to instil. The right person who is still learning will usually outgrow the talented person you cannot trust. When in doubt, keep looking — a wrong hire is more expensive than an empty seat.

- Get the right people on the bus before locking in the destination.
- Hire for character and values first; teach the skills second.
- Be rigorous, not ruthless — and do not let a wrong fit linger.
- When unsure about someone, wait; the cost of a bad hire compounds.

> **A QUIETER THOUGHT**
>
> Who you walk with shapes where you end up. Walk with the wise and become wise, says Proverbs, for the companion of fools suffers harm (Proverbs 13:20). The people on your bus do not just execute the culture — over time, they become it.

The bottom line

Decide who before you finalise what. Surround yourself with people of character you can trust, get the wrong people off the bus kindly but clearly, and the right team will help you find the road. Great businesses are built of great people first.

Sources

- Jim Collins, Good to Great — First Who, Then What.

Proverbs 13:20 — walk with the wise and become wise.

TAKE YOUR BRAND TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Want this done properly?

You can absolutely build on this yourself — that's why we wrote it. But if you'd rather have your brand, website and profile built as one considered system, that's exactly what we do. No obligation — just a conversation.

www.mediakim.co.za
info@mediakim.co.za
+27 72 925 2470

Mediakim (Pty) Ltd