

Who Will Be Your Best Employee?

What should you look for during the hiring process?

By Walt Grassl

Bob and Mark, new nonprofit managers, were discussing hiring strategies for an upcoming college job fair. The conversation turned into a debate on what type of graduate made the best employee.

Mark preferred to hire the 4.0 GPA graduates, regardless of how driven they appeared or how well they seemed to “play with others.” He figured he could instill the drive and the teamwork.

Bob believed in hiring people who were smart but not necessarily the smartest. He focused on those with 3.0 and above GPAs who demonstrated good collaboration skills. He figured that they were smart enough to learn and that teamwork would carry the day.

Patricia, a seasoned manager, joined the discussion. She believed that intelligence and high GPAs weren't the most important factors in choosing good employees. Instead, she liked to hire people who were hard workers. As long as people had a minimum amount of talent and intelligence, hard work would make them successful, she believed.

Who Has the Best Hiring Strategy?

Patricia is right. Hard working people make the best employees. Determination and perseverance are crucial traits in the workplace. You want employees who are determined to get things done, make things happen, and find better ways of doing things. Hard workers have honed those skills.

People are more likely to continue in the face of adversity if they think intelligence is only peripheral to their future success. Studies reveal that when facing difficulties, those who believed they could transform their performance through effort not only persevered but improved, whereas those who believed that intelligence was everything regressed.

When seeking productive employees, persistence and purposeful effort are more important than talent and intelligence. Without hard work, few will find a level of productivity that will pay off for your organization over time.

“When people are praised for their intelligence, they tend to avoid risk.”

What Should You Look For, & What Should You Ask?

Here are some qualities that indicate workers' ability to rise to the occasion, along with questions that will help you pinpoint people with those traits when you're interviewing potential hires:

ABILITY TO ADAPT TO CHANGE

In the workplace, success often depends upon the ability to change from one process to another. Highly intelligent people often have a set way of doing things and it works extremely well for them. They don't like to change what worked in the past. Change requires hard work, and many intelligent people aren't so flexible.

In your interviews, ask people to describe times that they were required to make large changes. Ask them how they were able to adapt.

INTEREST IN LEARNING

Many intelligent people feel that they don't have anything new to learn in their chosen field. They believe that what got them there is enough.

Those who are determined and who work hard often spend a lot of time and effort to maintain their skills and learn new ones. They frequently possess the most current knowledge of new technology and ideas. Having employees who will improve themselves over and above your organization's sponsored training is critical to an organization wanting to innovate and grow. No matter how smart they are, the lack of initiative, curiosity, and eagerness to improve will keep them in the mediocre zone.

Have interviewees tell you the most interesting new thing they've learned lately and how they learned it. Notice their body language to see if they're enthusiastic about the idea of gaining knowledge. If they haven't learned anything recently that excites them and if their eyes don't light up as they talk about it, they're unlikely to transform your workplace with the new ideas your organization needs.



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REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

People who are highly intelligent may believe they’re entitled to high pay levels, promotional opportunities, and unwarranted admiration. They can be the workplace equivalent of rockstars. Those who succeed based on hard work tend to have more realistic expectations.

Ask interviewees what they expect from the job. You’ll get a sense of whether their perspective is skewed and self-important or reality-based and down-to-earth.

WILLINGNESS TO TAKE APPROPRIATE RISKS

Studies have shown that when people are praised for their intelligence, they tend to avoid risk when given a choice in their next assignments. Why? If they’re less than perfect in the future, they’re afraid of not looking as smart. However, when people are praised for their hard work, they tend to welcome more challenging assignments.

While interviewing job candidates, probe their feelings about taking appropriate risks. Are they always challenging themselves? Do they like to take on ever-more-difficult tasks?

GOAL SETTING

People who set goals are usually more successful than those who don’t. The best goals are “stretch” goals. Stretch goals

are challenging but attainable. Hard workers tend to set such goals for themselves. They gain satisfaction from setting and working toward new targets. Unlike many highly intelligent people, hard workers avoid resting on their laurels.

In your interviews, ask people where they see themselves in a year, two years, five years. Note whether they have a plan to develop and improve themselves. Consider whether their goals are ones that will stretch them, challenge them, and help them grow.



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