



The importance of intangibles in hiring

When it comes to growing your business, the right people make all the difference. Whether you're hiring for an executive role or an entry-level position, intangibles such as attitude, work ethic and being a team player can mean the difference between someone who performs adequately in his or her role and someone who excels and grows with the organization.

In her article "Hiring for Intangibles" in the Harvard Business Review, Judith Ross shares a great example of a company that focused on intangibles in its hiring process. Two candidates were interviewing, and both had very similar backgrounds and experience; however, one did not graduate with honors from college. The search committee proceeded to ask the one candidate why he didn't graduate with honors, and his honest answer and the intangible it showed earned him the job.

"When the candidate who didn't graduate with honors was asked why he didn't, he explained that when he was in college, he had been married with two children and was holding down a full-time job because he had been obliged

to pay his own way," the article stated. "Then the candidate stopped himself mid-sentence and said, 'That's a lot of bull. The real answer is that it wasn't a priority for me to graduate with honors at that time. If it had been a priority, I would have figured out a way to do it.'"

The candidate's no-excuse attitude won him the job. "A willingness to take responsibility for your actions is one characteristic we really look for, and we actually made our selection based on that," explained the hiring search firm featured in the article.

I love this example because it not only shows a candidate turning an interview around with what starts out as a very rote, practiced response to one that is honest, self-aware and takes a risk, but also shows him demonstrating the very intangible the interviewer was looking for and earns him the job. So often if we are honest and open, it makes all the difference — in an interview, in the workplace and in our personal lives.

So, how do you implement an interview process that focuses on the intangibles? Here are four key steps:

Determine which intangibles are crit-

ical to your company. Great candidates will provide the most impact to a company that has a culture that naturally suits them. Develop a short list of traits or intangibles that are critical for all company employees. These could be traits such as taking ownership, work ethic, integrity and teamwork.

Next, determine which intangibles are most important for this particular position. Before you begin the interview process, determine which intangible traits are required for success in this position. For example, does the candidate need to be competitive, creative, a team builder, a natural leader, etc.? Does the candidate need to perform well under intense pressure, be strategic or detail-oriented?

Look at your top performers. I think this is so critical and something I like to focus on with clients when determining the criteria for a new search. Generally, your top performers will have the right mix of both skills and intangible traits. What intangibles do they display that make them successful beyond their skills and experience? Ask them which intangibles they feel

are critical to excel in your company.

Lastly, ask the right questions. Select interview questions that will reveal whether or not a candidate has the intangibles you've identified as critical for this role. Here's one of my favorite questions to ask a candidate: "When you think about the personality traits and abilities that have enabled you to be successful in the past, what three or four things come to mind?" Another favorite is what accomplishments have separated you from your peers. The way a candidate answers these questions tells you so much about what drives them. Focus on the candidates' past behaviors and achievements; these are great indicators of how they will perform for you.

As you grow your company and add to your team, remember the right people make all the difference. Focus on the intangibles in the hiring process so you can hire individuals who will excel and grow with your organization.

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