

What Should You Look for in the People You Hire?

Most leaders I've met want to build a high-performance organization. Instinctively, they know that this requires great people. But few of them have ever taken the time to define exactly what they are looking for when it comes to *the ideal candidate*.



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Good leaders begin the recruiting process with a written job description. This generally includes the required educational experience and technical skills. But great leaders need to do more than this. They must take a step back and look at the baseline qualities of the candidate.

They should ask,

What kind of prospective employees are we trying to attract to our organization?

What kind of people will it take to get the results we want and others expect?

What kind of people do we want to surround ourselves with?

What kind of people will contribute to the culture we are trying to build?

“Warm bodies” are obviously not enough. “Better-than-average” won’t get you there either. Even “really good people” are insufficient. You need higher standards if you are going to achieve your mission.

As I have thought about this, I have reduced these high standards to a sort of formula: “H³S.”

I want to fill my company with people who are humble, honest, hungry, and smart. The “h” in the word “high” represents the first three attributes. The “s” in the word “standards” represents the last attribute. All are equally important, but let me expound on each of them separately.

For simplicity sake, I’m going to use the masculine pronoun below, but it should be understood that the ideal candidate may, of course, be either a man or a woman. Gender is irrelevant.

Humble

A humble person has a good sense of himself. He doesn’t think more highly of himself than he should (pride), nor lower of himself than he ought (poor self-esteem). He is

sober-minded, having a realistic grip on his strengths and weaknesses.

He does not exhibit self-ambition. He might be ambitious for the cause, for the company, or for the team, but he is not ambitious *for himself*. He isn't overly-concerned about his title, his status, or his position relative to others.

In conversation, he assumes the posture of a learner. He doesn't pretend that he knows it all or even more than he does. It would certainly never cross his mind to assume that he is the "smartest person in the room."

He respects other points of view and asks questions to make sure that he understands the other position before criticizing it. He makes *other people* feel smart and competent.

He is other-centered, no matter who the other person is. He acknowledges "the little people," those that are easily overlooked by everyone else. He values them and treats them as peers.

Whenever I hire an executive, I always like to take him or her to dinner. I am always interested to see how he treats the hostess, the waiters, and even the busboys. Is he curt? Is he demanding or brusque? Does he treat them with dignity? Is he appreciative? Does he even notice them?

I am always leery of people who "suck-up" to people they want something from and disrespect everyone else. There's no explaining it away. This is a character flaw. I don't want someone like this working in my organization. I have no patience for it.

A humble person is open to correction and not defensive. He is quick to admit mistakes and apologize. He knows how to say, "I am sorry. What I did was wrong. Will you please

forgive me? (<http://michaelhyatt.com/ten-difficult-but-really-important-words.html>).” Everyone makes mistakes. The truly humble know how to make it right. Usually, they have had plenty of practice.

He is conscious of the contributions others have made to his life, his projects, and his career. He is quick to give credit to them and express sincere gratitude. Conversely, when others compliment him, he offers a simple “thank you,” without making a big fuss about it.

Finally, he does not consider certain jobs “beneath him.” He sees what needs to be done, pitches in, and is just happy to be part of the team.

Honest

As Dr. Stephen R. Covey points out in [The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People](#)

(<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0743269519/fwis-20>) :

Honesty is telling the truth—in other words, *conforming our words to reality*. Integrity is *conforming reality to our words*—in other words, keeping promises and fulfilling expectations. This requires an integrated character, a oneness, primarily with self but also with life” (pp. 195–196).

When I use the term “honesty,” I am referring to both honesty *and* integrity.

At the most basic level, an honest person does not lie. He does not exaggerate or misrepresent the facts. “Spin control” is a foreign concept. So is bragging. If anything, he is given to understatement, especially about his own accomplishments.

He does not withhold negative information. He gives you “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” He has the courage to face reality head-on and make his words conform to it. He would never ask someone else to lie on his behalf or to cover for him.

He is also honest in giving others feedback. He is able to be direct without being hurtful. He doesn’t create unnecessary drama. He doesn’t say anything about those who are absent that he wouldn’t say if they were present.

Finally, an honest person keeps his commitments, even when it is difficult, expensive, or inconvenient. If he said he would do it, he does it. You can take it to the bank.

Early in my career, I was able to land the job as a marketing director at one of the larger publishing houses. The only problem was that I didn’t have any experience. None!

So, my new boss put me on a kind of “90-day probationary period.” He said, “Look, I think you will do fine, but let’s agree to a 90-day trial run. If everything goes as planned, I will give you a raise equal to 10% of your annual salary. If not, we’ll shake hands and part company as friends.” I enthusiastically agreed, rolled up my sleeves, and got to work.

Knowing that this was an enormous opportunity, I read everything I could on marketing. I worked hard. I got to the office early and left late. I was determined to prove to my boss that he had made the right decision.

At the end of the 90-day period, I was actually looking forward to my review. I knew I had exceeded his expectations. I was confident I would get the raise.

My boss called me into his office. After the usual pleasantries, he said, “Mike, you have done an outstanding

job. You have exceeded my expectations in every way. I am very proud of you.”

“But I have one problem,” he continued. “Last week, our parent company instituted a salary and wage freeze. They have refused to consider any exceptions.”

My heart sank. Though I tried to appear professional, I’m sure that my disappointment was written all over my face.

Then he handed me an envelope and said the most amazing thing. “In that envelope is a check for the amount I promised you. It’s not from the company, but from me personally. I have discussed this with my wife, and we are both in agreement. You don’t have a choice about whether or not to accept it. So don’t even think about it. I made a commitment to you. You lived up to your end of the bargain—and then some—and I want to live up to mine.”

As a young businessman, that act made an enormous impression on me. Not only did it bond me to my boss—still one of my best friends—for life, it has provided concrete guidance in every tough decision I have ever made.

Hungry

A hungry person is someone with an appetite. Metaphorically speaking, his last meal is already a fading memory. He wants to eat, and he wants to eat now. All he can think about is food!

In other words, he doesn’t dwell on his past accomplishments. He is never satisfied. He is always reaching for more—setting higher goals. He is driven to exceed whatever expectations have been imposed upon him. This is just a part of his make-up.

A hungry person is intellectually curious. He reads constantly—newspapers, magazines, and books. Lots of books. He loves learning new things and sharing what he is learning with others.

He doesn't get stuck in ruts. He is open to new ideas and new ways of solving old problems. He is always looking for the best solution and embraces change if it will take him—or the company—to a new level.

He comes to meetings prepared, having completed his homework. In the meeting, he is an active listener, asking lots of questions *and* taking notes. After the meeting, he follows up. He completes his assignments on-time without someone having to prod him to do so. He is relentless when it comes to execution.

In short, a hungry person “plays full out,” holding nothing back. More than anything, he wants to win and is willing to pay the price to do so.

Smart

A smart person *usually* scores high on traditional IQ tests. But not always. You have to be careful. Some people are book-smart but street-stupid. I'd like to have both. But if forced to choose, I'll take the street-smart candidate.

A smart person is a quick study. He can “connect the dots” without a lot of help. He has a natural ability to “think laterally,” that is, across disciplines. He can apply what he learns in one field or category to another.

He is comfortable using metaphors and analogies. He knows how to make complex subjects simple without confusing himself and everyone else in the process.

I was a philosophy major. Some of the books I had to read were really difficult. I remember reading, re-reading, and then re-re-reading some particularly tough passages. Then it dawned on me. *If this guy is so smart, why can't he explain this in a way that is easy to follow?* Maybe this is a case of “the emperor has no clothes.”

In my experience, confusion sometimes masquerades as complexity. Listening to an explanation, you might be tempted to think that you're just not smart enough to understand the issue. But in reality, the presenter doesn't understand it well enough to make it simple. I want people working for me who are smart enough to work through the complexity in order to arrive at simple explanation.

A smart person also asks thoughtful questions. He sees connections between topics that others miss. He is aware of nuances. He has diverse interests, which come in handy when he is trying to understand new information.

He is also able to focus mentally, for long periods of time if necessary. He doesn't give up quickly. He keeps pressing until he gets the insight or clarity he needs. He is a creative problem-solver.

Finally, smart people have cognitive intelligence. That's most of what I have covered here. But that alone is not sufficient. In my opinion, a successful candidate also needs emotional, relational, and even spiritual intelligence to succeed.

Summary

It's hard to find the buried treasure unless you have a map.
It's difficult to win a scavenger hunt unless you have a list.
And, it's impossible to hire the right people unless you know *exactly* what you are looking for.

25 Questions to Ask in the First Interview

Yesterday, I described the ideal employee candidate (<http://michaelhyatt.com/what-should-you-look-for-in-the-people-you-hire.html>) as humble, honest, hungry, and smart. I represented this as a sort of formula: “H3S.” But how do you determine if someone you are interviewing has these qualities?



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I have a list of questions that I use during my first interview with a candidate. It has evolved over time, as I have gained more experience. I don't ask every question in every interview; rather I keep it on my lap as a reference.

Humble

1. How do you feel about this opportunity?
2. What work experiences have you had that prepare you to be successful in this position?
3. What do you see as your three greatest strengths?
4. What do you think is your biggest weakness?
5. How do you learn best? How would you describe your learning style?
6. You've obviously accomplished a great deal. To what do you attribute that success?
7. We all make mistakes. When you discover that you have made one, how do you handle it

Honest

8. Do you think that telling a "white lie" is ever justified "for the greater good"?
9. If things go wrong with a project, what obligation if any do you feel compelled to share with your boss?
10. If someone else has wronged you in some way, how do you deal with the situation?
11. Can you tell me about a recent situation where you had to share bad news with someone? How did you handle it?
12. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to make good on a commitment that you wished you hadn't made?

Hungry

13. Are you satisfied with what you have accomplished in your life so far?
14. Where do you see yourself in three years?
15. What are your biggest personal goals? career goals?
16. Would you consider yourself a reader? What kinds of things do you like to read?
17. What was the last book you have read? What are you reading now?
18. How do you make sure that you follow-up on your assignments? Do you have a system?
19. How do you typically prepare for meetings?

Smart

20. How well did you do in school? If you had to do it over again, how would you have done it differently?
21. What do you wish they had taught you in school that they didn't?
22. Do you consider yourself a smart person? If so, why?
23. What's your general approach to problem-solving?
24. How would you describe your learning style?
25. What are some of your interests outside of work?

Question: What questions would you add to these list? You can leave a comment by [clicking here \(25-questions-to-ask-in-the-first-interview.html#respond\)](http://michaelhyatt.com/25-questions-to-ask-in-the-first-interview.html#respond).