

Picking the Right People: In-Depth Interviewing Separates the Wheat from the Chaff

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If your own mother were suddenly struck down and confined to a wheel chair, unable to attend to her own affairs, and you needed to arrange for in-house care to attend to her every need, then you would interview. You would get to know the applicant inside-out. You would take the time to explore and probe. You would arrange for a nurse to give you a second technical opinion, and you would check references and investigate personal approaches to life that will impact your mother's life.

Over time, the results of your workplace interviews - those you hire - will push you ahead or drag you down. Just like your mom, it's important to pour yourself into the process of really knowing that person sitting across from you.

Explore the depths and corners of the real person sitting across from you. In essence, you want to pick winners and avoid losers.

In every area, hire the best applicants available. To surround yourself with winners, look for three things: past successes, intelligence and optimism. If you have passed a winner who is smart and upbeat, hire her. She'll be a winner.

If you'd prefer a loser, though, just go for the folks that are a step or two down from you in ability and thus, easy for you to control. It's a feel-good trap. You are in complete control, but of a continually sinking ship.

In my lengthy get-acquainted chat with folks, I'm looking for the best fit for them within our organization. In order of importance, I consider character, work ethic, appropriateness for the job, and experience.

Since you can't do a good deal with a bad guy, if you perceive bad character, cut your losses and go on to a better candidate.

With a hard-working, honest fellow, you can do a lot; so don't let him get away.

Appropriateness for the job comes next, and here I focus on how she thinks. Big-picture, logical thinkers make good managers; detail-oriented people make good accountants. A big-picture, empathetic person will generally do well in sales, and a detail-oriented empathetic will do well in customer service. Appropriateness outweighs experience alone because after a few months, everyone has experience.

When you need to hire, make the time to do it. Never pick the first pulse that comes through the door. Find intelligent, optimistic people. Carefully screen them for good character, a commitment to hard work, the right temperament for the job, and experience. The results will make your mother proud.◆