HIRING TALENTED TEAM PLAYERS
A GUIDE TO GETTING IT RIGHT EVERY TIME

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The Hiring Game

Chapter One

THE HIRING GAME

The most common hiring mistakes *seldom* come from selecting unqualified people. As the saying goes, “Hire for skills; fire for attitude.” The biggest mistakes come from hiring attitude problems and personality misfits. This failure is easy to understand. Very little is published on exactly how to detect attitudes during interviewing. And personality is too complicated to determine from interview questions.

Twenty seven years ago when I first set out coaching business leaders, they all seemed to want to focus on one subject—the frustrations they had with a handful of their problem employees. Yet, they liked them during the interviews and honeymoon periods but then became frustrated with them for the following reasons:

- Being emotionally unstable, moody or defensive.
- Having hidden agendas that neglected what management wanted.
- Upsetting customers with an indifferent attitude.
- Neglecting responsibilities.
- Personality clashes or stubbornness.
- Often absent.
- Going through the motions only to save their jobs.
- Lazy.
- Continuing to break the rules even after being confronted about it.

This is what I discovered. I started by asking my clients why they didn’t address the symptoms. I remember Russell Borghese (made up name) looked at me in silence trying to figure out a good way to sugar coat his explanation or switch the subject. Then he told me about all the sleep he had lost over a particular troublemaker and how he hoped circumstances would magically improve. When I suggested he confront this employee, he said, “Yes, that’s a good idea.” Unfortunately, despite the compliment—nothing happened. The idea of confronting negativity, even though he knew he should, was at the very bottom of his mental priority list. In addition, the idea of firing problem employees was met with a “You’ve got to be kidding” look.

At first, I thought they didn’t know how to manage their employees. But, when I encouraged them to coach, train or confront their troublesome employees, the return on investment was minimal. When these employees quit, were laid off or fired, my clients were always relieved. The truth was they had hired the wrong people. In addition, unless a major lay off occurred or someone prodded them, the hiring mistakes became part of the scenery.
When I delved into the situation of difficult employees, it never turned out to be a qualification problem. If you have managed for a while, I bet you know what I am going to say the problem was. Yes, these people had attitude or personality problems.

Amazingly, most problem employees are great when they start. They must know how to fly under the radar. It seems as if the employer and employee go on a honeymoon. The good news is that some leave after a couple of weeks—but with truck loads of blame.

I concluded that the most difficult employees had attitude problems or had the wrong personality for the job they were doing. I heard very little about those who were unqualified or lacked education. My clients were either doing a good job at screening out those types or they noticed the incompetence and booted them out quickly. I should also note that some employees with low emotional intelligence (EQ) were not doing their fair share.

**Why, Why, Why?**

Why were these problem employees so effective at making it through the mine field of interviews and getting the job? I observed several reasons for this.

Sometimes clients would advertise for candidates. When the resumes came in, they were able to eliminate many of the unqualified. However, to my amazement, after the interviewing and reference checks were over, about 80% (my guess) of the “qualified” people had negative or inappropriate traits. If we were lucky, we would find one good candidate from an ad that ran two weeks on multiple job boards. So sorting through the masses of unemployed only took one minor hiccup, and another problem was invited to the team. Unfortunately, there was only a very small percentage of productive good-natured people looking for jobs. And an even lower percentage had the right personality for the job.

Also, most managers had never gone to “interviewing school.” Their candidates on the other hand were street smart, savvy, and well trained in the hiring game. These applicants usually had a history of being fired (under the heading of laid off and other palatable reasons). With all the experience going from interview to interview, reading books, attending job connection groups and attending seminars, they learned how to con most interviewers. A problem employee is *not* dumb; in fact, most of them are the smartest people you will ever meet (seriously).

In hindsight, the biggest reason for hiring problems was a failure to understand the telltale indicators for these types. Most of my clients knew the indicator of how often they go to greener pastures and how often they get fired. But, if that was not obvious, they erroneously thought that those who acted nicely and were likeable in an interview would also be that way on the job.
I think you will agree the loyal, hard-working, good-natured types seldom quit their jobs. These people seldom get much of a chance to practice interviewing skills. This makes interviewing even more confusing because the best can look the worst and the worst can look the best!

The Big Picture

Throughout twenty-seven years of closely examining hundreds of organizations, I have witnessed the result of corporate America’s inability to sort the good-natured people from the problem types by just looking at the people they have working for them. Based on what clients have told me and what I have personally witnessed, I diagramed these percentages:

- Five percent are good-natured employees who are hard working, loyal, cooperative, positive, thoughtful and competent. These employees need little or no supervision. Unfortunately, they are often taken for granted.
- Thirty percent are mostly good natured and hard working but have some minor rough edges.
- Thirty percent have personality rough edges, such as rule breaking, personal agendas, outspoken negativity and stubbornness. Their rough edges are easily managed, and their productivity more than makes up for the irritations they cause.
- Thirty percent have a poor attitude. They are sometimes unwilling, offensive, unmanageable, absent and selfish (have their own agendas), but are productive. Their faults can be hidden for up to a year. While half of them respond satisfactorily to discipline and need plenty of it, the other half keep relapsing back into bad attitudes. The ones that relapse are similar to the next category, but not as bad.
- Five percent are the quintessential problem employees. They are unmanageable, emotionally unstable, offensive, and they scheme away on their own agenda—yet can they do a bang-up job. They often show an unyielding what’s-in-it-for-me attitude. They don’t (and won’t) respond to correction, discipline, punishment, fines or anything else you can dream up. They may pretend improvement for a few weeks. This is why the “three strikes and you’re out” law came into effect for criminals—these types don’t ever get it. No matter how hard anyone tries to change them, they won’t. And, just like the previous category, the extent of their negativity can be camouflaged for up to a year after being hired. In reality, most problem people could care less about hiding their ugly side after the probation period is over and they have their medical benefits. Employers keep them around because they are often the most skilled, but the hardest to confront and the most secretive about the total number of problems they cause. Don’t get me wrong, employers know about the problems, but not the overall extent (at least until the employee leaves).
Most managers are relieved when one of these types are gone. The co-workers who had to work closely with them are also relieved. The manager may feel sorry about the loss of skill, ability and know how, but overall she is also relieved.

This is the good-natured employee, who is hard-working, loyal, cooperative, positive, thoughtful and competent. These employees need little or no supervision and, unfortunately, are often taken for granted.

The quintessential problem employee. This is the unmanageable, emotionally unstable, offensive and own-agenda employee. They have a strong ‘what’s-in-it-for-me’ attitude. They can do an excellent job. They don’t (do not as in never) improve from being yelled at or anything else.

These are the good-natured, hard-working employees who have some minor rough edges.

They are occasionally unwilling, offensive, unmanageable and selfish (have their own agendas) who do a good job. Half of them respond well to discipline. The other half continue to have a bad attitude.

A good, competent, productive employee, except for some rough edges like being absent, stubbornness and rule breaking.

Many problem people, who are hired but detected early on and let go, are not part of this pie chart. However, they are part of the hiring mistakes.

Isn’t it amazing that companies can survive? And, do you know what—many small ones don’t. From many studies of new companies, I have heard that only about 5% survive their first ten years. I’m sure you have noticed some big ones failing, but many of the ones that don’t make it are quite small. They are picked off one by one, not because of market conditions (their competitors survive), but poor management. Because the success of companies depends on people—no, the right people. One of the biggest reasons these failed companies are pushing up daisies is due to management incompetence when making hiring decisions.

A good exercise is to think about those who report to you, by putting them in the pie chart. Be honest. Now you know if your hiring process is better or worse than the average by looking at your own company’s pie chart. If you don’t have people reporting to you, the pie chart won’t be as real, unless you are very observant. The brutal, horrible, painful truth is that too many problem employees, personality misfits and those with low emotional intelligence get hired.
What is the Price Tag for Ignoring Problem Employee Indicators?

Those on the top right side of the pie chart rarely make a net profit for a business. Sure they will make money, but not profits. As any manager knows, the full extent of their damage is usually hidden until they leave.

The overall cost of a bad hire, I have been told by those who research these things, can be as high as two times the annual salary of the employee, especially when they are entrenched. Therefore, the higher and more highbrow the position is—the greater the expense.

If you examine some of the following reasons, you will understand why the cost is so high:

- They make money but not a profit.
- They cause the team unnecessary stress.
- They upset customers with missed deadlines and indifferent attitudes.
- They wreck everyone’s day as well as team spirit. (They scare some.)
- They cause good workers to be falsely blamed.
- The time, money, and effort to train them must be spent again with a new replacement.
- The price for typical learning mistakes needs to be paid for once again.
- The manager is under continuous pressure to weigh the pros and cons of keeping them. (Stress.)
- The manager has the unpleasant task of confronting them. Or, the manager who won’t confront them has an unpleasant feeling from, avoiding, feeling guilty, and avoiding some more, until the inevitable blows up.
- The manager has the rotten task of firing them.
- The manager may have to live with guilt, due to the fired person’s family situation.
- Lost productivity from not having someone who is the right fit for the position
- Costs related to recruiting a replacement.
- Frivolous unemployment claims or unfounded litigation for falsely perceived employer violations of the local job codes.

For example, one client hired a very energetic salesperson who bothered the other sales people and lowered the overall sales (even though his numbers looked good), and when he finally got the boot, he had already brainwashed a good employee into quitting. His boss caught him taking the best leads for himself in a sneaky way. The financial loss, from lost sales, the expense of replacing him and the one he negatively influenced, easily exceeded two times his annual earnings.

Another walking disaster was a desktop publishing wiz, who repeatedly chose to ignore job priorities. He also refused to recheck details, which caused customer complaints. His failures caused many headaches and slowdowns among the team. His manager’s manager finally figured out who was causing the trouble and allowed the manager to give him his
walking papers. The bill for the company’s hiring blunder was at least twice his annual salary. This manager concluded—skill alone was of little value without cooperation.

The emotional suffering and stress for keeping a problem is even higher. A supervisor is either faced with the unpleasant task of continually disciplining the person or letting the cancer drift to others. If you add the hard cash and personal grief from hiring a person like this, the value of hiring good people becomes a matter of survival.

My management consultant brother once told me that all his clients who had problem employees in key positions were in financial trouble. The moment they corrected the matter, their businesses did well again. This is serious business.

**Understanding the Solution**

You can compare interviewing to dating, especially after a divorce. The person is concerned the new date may also be a problem. But the person is nice and loving during the mating ritual—the same way the problem person was. Subtle inquiries produce all the right responses. But, because of the past lousy experience, there is uncertainty. Who can blame the person for that? On the other hand, the new love may really be great. You just don’t know.

At this point, you are probably wondering the same thing I did twenty seven years ago. If you can’t tell problem people from their outward manner, then how can you tell—especially when they seemed to have been on previous jobs for a long time? So, I decided to figure out what other hiring pros had written. Amazingly, they only touched on attitude and focused more on the art of interviewing.

The main hiring principle in my head was that past behavior was the best predictor of future behavior. This worked well for skills and competence but not for detecting attitudes. It seemed that almost all candidates were convincingly honest, loyal, hard working and cooperative. In other words, the questions available at that time were not cutting through the act and revealing the truth.

For many years, I suggested to my clients to closely question the reasons candidates gave for leaving previous jobs, which did help. But, few job applicants “had ever been fired.” They were laid off and quit for bigger challenges but, surprisingly, never fired (I’m sure you know how that works). Another strategy was to refuse to hire anyone who had worked for more than three companies in five years. Both ideas helped a little, but I really needed interview questions to expose the problems from the good-natured people.

Then, one day in 1991 when I was studying honesty testing, I made a life altering realization. Let me explain. Honesty tests are made up of statements related in directly to honesty principles. These assessments ask for opinions in such a way that right or wrong answers are difficult to determine by someone who lacks basic honesty principles. The key
was asking for opinions, N-O-T past behavior. After massaging the idea for a while, this is what I discovered:

**IN ORDER TO EXPOSE ATTITUDE TRAITS YOU MUST ASK A PERSON ABOUT THEIR CORE VALUES, WITHOUT TIPPING YOUR HAND.**

In other words, ask for the person’s opinions about honesty, loyalty, supportiveness, responsibility and so on. But, do it in a way the job seeker has no clue what you think are the right answers. This is easier said than done. Thankfully, later in this book, you can learn this method of questioning along with the interview questions.

Let me give you an example. Ms Interviewer asks Mr. Job seeker, “What would you do if your boss asked you to lie about a delivery date?” (Job seeker wonders what the right answer might be, but the interviewer hasn’t indicated anything.) So, falling back on his core values blurs out, “I would do what my boss wanted. If he asked me to lie, I would lie. If he didn’t want me to lie, then I wouldn’t.” (By the way, some people actually answer the question that way.) The interviewer ends the interview and sends him on his way, saving the company from another problem.

After I had figured out the formula for attitude interview questions, they started to flow like a creek after a big storm. Then I applied these questions every time I interviewed someone. I wrote down the answers I got to the new questions for future research. After about 6 months, I researched how they had worked in reality. And sure enough! My clients indicated improvements through this type of interviewing. Then through many years of trial and error and with the help of my clients, these questions have been refined. They are organized in their entirety in Chapter Eleven.

**The Attitude Test**

At the time of the realization, I had been upgrading my business-personality assessment. So, with my new insights and my focus on testing, I wanted to take the next step and also develop an assessment that would detect the problem types.

I knew how honesty tests were put together, so all I needed to do was change the subject to attitude traits. Although my clients did have the occasional problems with theft of money and equipment, the far more common problems were attitude ones. So, I developed a new attitude and integrity assessment at the same time I worked on the interviewing questions.

Years later, I found out that other Test Publishers had also come up with attitude assessments. I continue to improve mine based on client feedback—also officially known as “Predictive Validity” (how well does the assessment do what it is supposed to do by checking back about a year later). The last version 14 was released in 2012 and has a 90% accuracy rating. My clients must be happy with this assessment as they vote with their dollars year after year.
An attitude and integrity assessment shows different degrees of attitude tendencies similar to the pie chart mentioned earlier. If the client wants to confirm the results, all she has to do is ask the prepared questions organized in Chapter 11—especially in the areas the assessment indicated possible problems. When you add interview questions, reference checks along with an attitude and integrity assessment, you will slam the door shut on any new problem employees entering your workforce. Also, this assessment will save those precious hours of interview time.

I notice my clients who use this assessment have also changed their work environments. They no longer tolerate paying for enemy like activities. They seem more upbeat, profitable and are much more able to withstand economic turndowns.

Although my clients voted dishonesty, personal agendas, absenteeism and emotional outbursts as big problems, I also realized some of those same problems were coming from personality selections. In other words, they were hiring personality types that didn’t fit the jobs. In lay person’s language, they were trying to fit round pegs in square holes.

**Personalities**

Identifying personality profiles is most important for job fitting, but it is also important to uncover traits that are dangerously weak or too compulsive.

Because interviewing for personality traits and profiles is almost impossible, this is a case where I strongly recommend using a personality assessment before making a hiring decision. I also developed one of these, which I explain in Chapter 3.

Personality is a *big* hiring subject. It is also important when dealing with people. When you read Chapter 3, it will translate the relevant personality features a supervisor needs to know into plain English. I also included the interview questions concerned with personality in the chapter that deals with interviewing techniques, Chapter 11.

**Common Interview Mistakes**

These are the four most common blunders interviewers make:

- Talking too much. (Explaining, not interviewing.)
- Emotionally believing the candidate is perfect before digging deeper.
- Jumping to conclusions from scraps of information.
- Carelessly divulging to the candidate what the interviewer hopes to hear.

A full explanation and cure for these are covered in the two interviewing Chapters 9 and 10. After some careful study, the full extent of these bad habits will become obvious. Once you see what you’re doing, your ability to interview will improve and continue to improve. And, if you interview with the questions suggested in Chapter 11, you will seldom make
these mistakes. Those questions force you to ask about values and present situations, without exposing what you hope to hear. You will also find out more than just scraps of information.

Covering All the Bases

Before you hire someone, you should answer the 12 queries below:

1. Does the candidate have all the skills to do the work?
2. Does the candidate have the education to do the work?
3. Does the candidate have the experience to do the work?
4. Is the candidate bright enough, quick enough and creative enough?
5. Will the candidate be satisfied with the amount of money and benefits the company can afford to pay?
6. Does the candidate have a good nature (Hard worker, positive, responsible, truthful, loyal and emotionally stable? Not a problem or criminal?).
7. Will the candidate fit into the culture of the company?
8. Does the candidate have the right personality for the work?
9. Does the candidate have the interest in doing the work?
10. Does the candidate like working inside (desk jockey) or outside?
11. Will the candidate be able to meet the company’s attendance requirements?
12. Does the candidate have the ability to perform specific job functions, with or without special accommodation? (See Americans with Disabilities Act in the chapter on legal questioning).

You can make this your check off list before making an offer to a candidate. When clients ask me if they should hire someone, I just go through the list and determine what queries haven’t been answered. Then I suggest they explore those unknown or doubtful ones. Some ask me to interview the person checking 6 through 9 when they are not sure. Checking all these twelve queries is another insurance policy to prevent the waste and problems of hiring a wrong person.

Query number 7: will the candidate fit the culture of the company? Focuses on whether or not the person and the company have similar core values. One thing I have found over the years is that if the employer has good moral values, then a person with a good attitude will usually fit in that culture. You must have good moral values or you wouldn’t be reading this. So, all you need to do is make sure your job seeker doesn’t have a poor attitude and you have covered queries 6 and the most important parts of 7 in one fell swoop.

If you are like most managers, you are probably buried under mountains of papers and fighting fires on several fronts (some of them set by your own problem employees). The idea of going through all twelve queries must be frustrating. Thankfully, there is an answer to the time-crunch squeeze.
The Good News

If you look at the twelve queries just covered, you will notice that the first five are usually easy to find out about. And any improvement will increase your hiring accuracy and save yourself a bunch of time messing with the unqualifieds. One obvious time saver is to quit talking so much. Also, better interview questions will get to the meat of the matter faster.

If you decide to use personality and attitude assessments, you will eliminate time on queries 6, 7, 8 and some of 9 (interest in the work). I say some of 9 because the right personality for the task is almost another way of saying interest in the task. You will quickly figure out number 10 (likes working inside or outside), number 11 (attendance) and a few remaining questions about number 7 (cultural fit) with a few questions. If you know your legal way around hiring (see Chapter 13 on legal), number 12 will seldom come up as a problem. With the time saved, you will be able to scrutinize more applicants to find better people.

If you don’t like the idea of using the Attitude Assessment for number 6 and 7, then you can become an expert by studying the next chapter. That chapter makes the obscured integrity and attitude indicators so obvious that even the most polished, problem candidates will be easy to recognize. Never again will you be fooled by the friendly, personable cheese-eating grins.

Personality assessments are another story. It is very time consuming and almost impossible to interview for personality profiles. You either measure the candidate’s personality or cross your fingers and hope queries number 8 and 9 will be right. Chapter 3 describes in street language the highlights of personalities. It teaches how to translate personality assessment results into hiring decisions. And, yes, if you decide to figure out a person’s temperament from the interviews, that chapter will help.

Other Advantages

Think about your competitors missing the tell-tale signs of a problem employee and personality round pegs in square holes. You on the other hand, will now recognize and pick the productive good-natured candidates from among the sea of those looking for jobs. Your competitors may end up with the problems and will spend their time and money psychoanalyzing, arguing with, worrying about and counseling them. Your business becomes more and more successful; you and your team will have more fun.

When you start interviewing for attitude traits, you will recognize more and more of those types already on board. Your tolerance for their behavior will diminish considerably, and your understanding of their cost will increase. You may even feel more motivated to confront and fire them.
What About the Scarcity of Good Candidates?

I was hoping I didn’t bring that up. The biggest challenge in hiring is finding good candidates to interview. I know you know this and that is why I wrote Chapter Five. It costs money to find good candidates, especially using recruiters. In order to make a commitment to invest in finding good candidates, you will want to feel confident about those hiring decisions. If you can identify truly good people, you can afford the cost of lining up good candidates.

On the subject of recruiters, they mostly focus on experience, skills and education, which is valuable. Don’t tell them to weed out the attitude problems or mess with personality. They are rarely trained to do it, so wouldn’t know how, and not motivated to reduce their commissions. In addition, you sure don’t want them coaching their job seekers to practice cheese-eating grins. It is up to you (not them) to be vigilant on those attitude and personality traits.

Where to Go from Here

Looking for the right person can wear a manager down. Interview exhaustion is real. It causes managers to short cut requirements to reduce the number of interviews. It’s therefore important to work out a good hiring procedure that produces great employees, before the interviewer gets exhausted. This book is written for the purpose of helping you establish such a process.

The next two chapters examine attitude and personality. Chapters 4 through 12 are in the sequence of actions to hire effectively. You can study those chapters just before the action needed to help really implement the ideas.

The best strategy for the war on negativity requires Guerrilla tactics. Study this book. Apply what you learn. Make adjustments and keep on applying. Use attitude and personality assessments before making hiring decisions. Hire the right people. Save your company from the cancer of negativity, mediocrity, and misfits.

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