



# WHY PEOPLE GET HIRED

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## WHY PEOPLE GET HIRED

20% of a hiring decision is based on the question “Can the candidate do our job?” This is obviously the “threshold” question to be answered affirmatively. None of the other questions need answering unless this is correct. A word of caution needs to be emphasized in dealing with this question. There is often a tremendous amount of *assuming* that goes on in considering this question on the part of interviewing and hiring authorities. There is a tendency to *assume* that because a person has been a controller, for instance, that he or she knows a lot about accounting. And they may, but they may not know or have recently practiced the kind of accounting they are being hired to do.

For instance, we recently placed a controller with a small-size organization. His recent experience, for the past 10 years, had been managing the accounting department in a company three times the size we placed him with. He was really good at analyzing financials and giving reports, but he hadn't actually put numbers in columns, balanced accounts or done hands-on work with an accounting software package in 10 years. The interviewing authorities liked the guy so much they just assumed he could do the job. They hired him. Fortunately, our candidate realized that it was going to take him two or three months to get up to speed to do what our client wanted done within the first two weeks of his employment, so he suggested to our client that he was the wrong guy for the job. Our number two candidate was still available and stepped right in when the first candidate resigned. No one was upset or disturbed and everything worked out very smoothly.

Assumptions about the first candidate were made by our



client and assumptions about the job were made by our candidate. Everyone was so enthusiastic about the candidate and the opportunity that they neglected to investigate the details of the day-to-day job and the candidate's ability to perform them. Everyone was looking at the big picture and forgot the details.

The lesson is to assume nothing when it comes to a candidate's ability to do the job and verify it in as much detail as possible. This isn't that hard to do and most interviewing and hiring authorities can easily come up with the right questions that need to be answered and verified. Everyone got so wrapped up in the emotions of liking each other and wanting to be associated with each other, they forgot to do this.

## DO WE LIKE YOU?

40% of a hiring decision is based on the question "Do we like the candidate? Does he or she fit into our culture?" Most people don't like to admit that the weight of this question is as great a part of the decision it is. We've seen a phenomenal number of marginally qualified candidates become successful because they were "liked" by the people in the company. We have never seen even the most qualified candidate get hired if he or she isn't liked by the people in the company.

As we have mentioned before, the heavy weight that this reason for getting hired carries is both good news and bad news. Our files are full of tremendously successful stories of mediocre candidates who became rock stars because they joined an organization where they were especially liked, appreciated and encouraged. These candidates will often admit that they fell into the right situation at the right time with the right people. Luck!



We can also enlighten you with stories of candidates who were hired based on their being likable and fitting into the organization only to have it discovered that they were very poor performers. As we've mentioned, it's not likely that any candidate is going to be hired unless they are, to a certain extent, liked by the potential employers. But often, candidates and potential employers can like each other so much they forget to go beyond the "likability" issue and dig deep into the candidates past, track record and performance or the company's track record of helping people become successful.

We don't have to look far to see a major example of the problem people run into when they hire someone they like regardless of their ability to do the job. We simply have to look at some of the highest political offices in the United States to see that many times we elect people we really like only to find out that their leadership is poor. In fact, there's a great many of them that if they actually "worked" in a business they would have been fired a long time ago based on their performance. (It is called the Warren Harding effect. Read *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell.) But they were elected because people just "liked" them and didn't judge them on their track record.

It is important that everybody like each other, at least to the extent that they can work with each other. But what is more important is everyone's mutual success. The lesson is to make sure that the candidate is liked and will fit into the organization. But we shouldn't get distracted by this and should spend a lot of the time in the interviewing process digging deeper into a candidate's experience and background. In fact, the best hiring authorities are especially on their guard to be thorough when they really like the candidate.



## ARE YOU A RISK?

30% of a hiring decision is based on the question “Is this candidate a risk?” Are there things in his or her background, experience, or elsewhere that lead us to believe the person will fail or not be with us for too long? Is this person going to make us look bad? Rightfully so, this is the second most important question that should be asked about any candidate. There is also both good news and bad news in considering this question.

Leopards very, very seldom change their spots. The candidate who has been in his or her last three jobs for one year each is likely to be with his or her next job for only one year. This is to only say, however, that the *odds are in favor* of the candidate only being on the next job for one year. Specific circumstances are very important. Greater odds do not ensure probability.

For instance, companies expand and contract more now than they ever have. In 1973 the average age of a company in the United States was 53 years old. In 2009 the average age of a company in the United States was 15 years. In 2013 that average had fallen to 12.5 years. The business climate is more treacherous and erratic than it is ever been. The average 40-year-old in the United States has had 10 jobs. The average job in the United States lasts 2.5 years. The business climate is different than it has been in the past. In this context, the fact that a candidate may have had three jobs in three years might be more reasonable.

The same principle would apply to candidates who have been out of work for more than six months or a year. In a recent experiment by Rand Ghayad of Northeastern University, 4800 fictitious computer-generated resumes that represented candidates with identical credentials except for unemployment



duration and industry experience were sent to 600 random job openings. He found that applicants who had been out of work for more than six months were almost never contacted for an interview. He found that employers would rather call someone with no relevant experience who has only been out of work for a few months than someone with more relevant experience who's been out of work longer than six months. It didn't seem to matter how much experience the person had. It didn't seem to matter why the person lost their previous job. It only seemed to matter that if you had been out of work for more than six months you weren't a palatable candidate.

Assuming that an interviewing or hiring authority has a choice between what are perceived to be equally qualified candidates, with the exception that one of them has been out of work for a year or more, it's logical that an interviewing or hiring authority would choose the candidate who is either presently employed or has been out of work a short period of time. That certainly makes sense. But we all know that in today's erratic business climate being out of work for a year may not be anything but a reflection of a grim reality.

The lesson is that some risks might be worth considering.

## CAN WE WORK THE MONEY OUT?

10% of the hiring decision is based on the question, "Can we work the money out?" 99% of the time, if the other questions are answered satisfactorily, the money will work out. The few times that the money doesn't work out is the result of poor communication *during* the interview process. If things progress as they should, the best hiring authorities know what the person being interviewed is expecting in terms of money



and has communicated the monetary value the company has placed on the job.

If a glitch over money occurs at the offer stage, it usually means that the hiring authority didn't have a clear idea about the candidate's expectations and what they were willing to pay during the interviewing process. Every once in a while, a candidate will get a big head and suddenly think they're worth a lot more than they are, because our client company has pursued them pretty hard. They then make a relatively ridiculous demand during the offer process, regardless of what has been communicated to them during the interviewing process about what the job is worth. The best hiring authorities don't let this approach frazzle them. They calmly try to work the money out with the candidate, and if it works, great . . . if it doesn't, they move to the number two candidate. The key is to have an idea about what kind of money everyone is thinking about *before* they get to the offer stage.