

## Defining the Best Candidate Traits

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Your business probably hires only a few mid to senior level leaders each year and your internal recruiter typically does a fair job of getting suitable candidates. Sure, every so often you have to request even more resumés from human resources to find the right candidates, and occasionally you get frustrated because they can't find anybody suitable at all. And, sometimes, you outsource to a Search Firm. You've probably said to yourself, "They're expensive, but they know what they're doing!"

May I ask you a few questions? If you stick with me, you should discover how to work with your internal recruiter to find really great candidates, with less effort and less cost than you do now.

- How much time do you spend developing the requisition and completing a thorough [Job Analysis](#) with all the stakeholders? Where is this position trending?
- What's your real definition of 'suitable candidates' or 'the best candidates'?
- Do you have any benchmarks or baselines for the position against which to compare them?

In my experience, most hiring managers are willing to spend a great deal of time interviewing but they are less willing to dedicate time to talk to their internal recruiter about the position when they hand over the requisition. In addition, most recruiters will not get at the 'tip of the sword' and demand an 'applicant target profile' be completed before ads go out.

This time allotment drastically changes when a decision is made to use a Search Firm. For some reason, when the position is outsourced, they find time to really think about the kind of person they want to hire and how that position aligns to their organization chart. Time is spent with the Search Firm reviewing duties, responsibilities, relationships, work environment, traits, competencies, education, training and past experience. The result is that the Executive Recruiter does a better job than the internal recruiter who didn't have that conversation with you – and the results are proof of how important it is that the internal recruiter knows **exactly** what you want.

But, again, my guess is that you 'use your gut' when it comes to defining what you want. You say to yourself that you'll know the "best" when you see it. After all, you've been in your field for a while and can generally spot a loser. If you are lucky, you've had a recruiter at some time in the past that could always seem to get you the perfect candidate - but you've never stopped to ask yourself why they could do that or how.

We all unconsciously look for certain traits in people and we are usually very adept at determining whether or not a candidate has those traits. What is unfortunate is that we almost never can articulate them. And even though we may believe that we are choosing candidates solely on the basis of experience and demonstrated skills, there is always our unconscious influencing the decision. That recruiter who always seemed to find the perfect candidate was able to figure out what those unconscious traits were and use established interviewing and screening skills to bring you those kinds of candidates who also had the necessary technical skills and experience.

You can help yourself hire better people, and at the same time help your recruiting staff, by simply heeding the following few tips about hiring. I also want to warn you that when you start to apply these tips, you may learn that many times you will find yourself rethinking certain positions – and maybe even finding out that some of your employees are a lot better than (or not so capable as) you thought.

### **1. Learn about the talent marketplace.**

What is the demand and supply is for the kind of people you are looking for? Most of us don't have that kind of information handy, yet demand and supply are what makes it easy or hard to find the right people. Your internal recruiter should be able to help you obtain the data you need around this.

For example, Enterprise Resource Planning Project Managers are in very short supply and no one, anywhere in North America, has a surplus of them. This means that it takes longer to find candidates, that it's harder to get them to say yes to your offer, and that they will get a higher salary than they did a few years ago. Other transferable skill sets may be easier to find.

### **2. Get to know your recruiter.**

If your internal recruiter is new or has not worked with you before, it will be impossible for them to know what you are really looking for. Even an experienced recruiter who knows your specialty thoroughly will have to get to understand those subtle traits that you find compelling.

Let the recruiter spend a day shadowing the hiring manager, and advise them of the manager's style. Let them attend staff meetings. The better the recruiter and the hiring manager knows each other, the more likely you are to see great candidates.

### **3. Determine exactly what you need for the position**

As discussed in my introduction, many businesses don't take the time to determine exactly what the business needs. A thorough [Job Analysis](#) evaluates the duties, tasks and responsibilities, environment, tools and equipment, relationships, and the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for that position to be effective in generating revenue. Analyze the job; not the person.

#### **4. Set Your Company Apart before you**

When you post an opportunity, you aren't just attracting one applicant; you are affecting an entire family. You need to ensure that your business is presented so that all are interested in the new position. Develop a compelling profile of the company and position that can be sent to 'qualified' prospective employees after they apply. Allow your internal recruiter to set your opportunity apart from all others by giving an applicant the full picture of your business, community, and corporate culture.

#### **5. Working with your internal recruiters, develop a pre-interview evaluation process.**

One of the best ways to make sure that you and your recruiters are in sync on what kinds of people to look for is to put together a process for evaluating candidates. You can work together with the internal recruiter to develop a series of questions that will help you both evaluate whether an applicant has the skills and experience you need. These can be used prior to an interview to assist in the short-listing process.

A resumé is a sales document - don't waste time interviewing someone who has received assistance from a professional to write it - they may not really have the skills you need. These questions can be also used as part of an interview and can also be used to measure how well the recruiting process is working.

#### **6. Determine the skills and competencies of your best performers to develop a benchmark for comparison.**

Spend at least a day or two thinking about your best performers. If you could, who are the people in your department you would like to clone? Try to put why you think they are so good into words.

Use a valid assessment tool to determine those top performers' specific abilities, interests, motivations, personalities, aptitudes, and skills and establish their results as the benchmark for that position.

Here are a few questions that you can use: What does this person do on a regular basis that pleases you? What positive behaviors do you see regularly that you believe makes them successful? Are there stories you can tell about a time an employee did something you found exceptional or notable? Take some time to talk to the recruiters about past or current employees who you view as exceptional.

#### **7. Work with your recruiter to develop some metrics that will show how well you both are doing in getting good people.**

There are many possible metrics, but the ones that are the most important are those that relate to the quality of the candidates you see and ultimately hire, and the speed in which you got to see them. Establish some measures with your

recruiter around quality – maybe measuring how quickly a new employee hit the productivity level you want, or how well they became a part of your team. By doing this you prove to yourself that you are getting the best people and you help guide your recruiter to those people.

By taking just a few minutes from your busy day, and by working with your internal recruiter as a partner, you can improve the quality of candidates and the speed you fill your open positions.

## **8. Get Outside Assistance**

I'm not saying replace your internal recruiter - but depending on the workload, outsourcing individual components of a recruitment strategy can release your internal recruiter to focus on revenue generating activities. The cost-effective alternative to signing a contract with a Staffing Firm is to hire a Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) firm - they will assume responsibility for whatever steps in your recruitment process that you desire - reducing effort and for less than you expect. Check out [www.smarthire.ca](http://www.smarthire.ca) for details.