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The Resume is Not the Candidate – Find the Inner Fire

by Herb Greenberg

Reflecting back to when I was in high school, I earned wonderful grades – straight A's in challenging subjects like geometry, trigonometry and calculus. In college, my academic prowess was consistently impressive.

Today, however, if you want me to write a calculus equation, or solve a complex trigonometry problem, I could not do it. Similar grades in Spanish and German today bear no relevance to my knowledge of those languages.

Simply put, being a well-rounded student had no more relationship to the occupational success that followed for me than whether a star basketball player can hit a baseball. Such a player is certainly a well-rounded athlete, but when it comes down to the brass tacks of his batting average, the team manager isn't going to care how many free throws he made. The same experience applies to business: how we look at who to hire, and how to get maximum value out of people currently working for us.

When growing and developing today's sales force, all too often hiring managers are giving outdated weight to experience – in other words, to whether a candidate is “well rounded” – rather than focusing on personality attributes. By “personality attributes,” I mean those qualities that inform inner motivation, that reflect a genuine dedication and desire to do the kind of work required by the specific job for which they're being recruited. Hiring managers need to look beyond the resume to each candidate's potential for contribution to their particular business, in the specific position for which they're hiring.

In my company's review of assessments of more than 3.5 million people for some 28,000 companies, we've often found that many “well rounded” people are in the wrong job. In this “misemployed” state, they are not producing to their maximum potential. The key to unlocking their contribution potential is not linked to how well rounded they are. The missing link lies in determining whether or not they are doing what their core personality indicates they should be doing. Are they doing what they uniquely define as motivating and inspiring?

I've seen it first-hand, time and again: when the hiring manager focuses on each candidate's inner fire, that motivation and collection of personality attributes that drive them to do a specific job for which they're being recruited, or in which they're functioning currently, the result is a substantial increase in return on investment for that hire.

Unfortunately, what managers tend to do is to assume they can shape new hires to be what they want them to be. The result of that

wishful thinking is all too often firing that employee – particularly when it comes to leadership positions – within their first six months. In sales, everyone is aware of critically high turnover rates and their associated losses. When I founded Caliper over 50 years ago, we were told by a leading insurance company that they lose 60 percent of their agents in one year and 90 percent in three years. All too often, the numbers are similar today.

Amazingly, just about everyone in the “people professions” say you can teach skills, but you can't teach attitude or motivation. Yet many keep hiring in the same old way and meeting the same old challenges. Consider this article a clarion call: I am advocating for a reversal of the typical hiring process that hires based largely on experience. Let me be clear: I am not saying experience does not matter at all. However, the weight it has been given historically when hiring for sales has been to the detriment of making a true “job match” and best ensuring future success.

Instead of dismissing a candidate who lacks a pre-set experience set, learn more about who that person is. Then, see if their unique qualities show a genuine dedication and desire to do the kind of work required. Next, apply appropriate training to polish their skills, i.e. the specific knowledge set required for the particular job.

Exciting things will happen when you hire for motivational fit, versus experience:

- *Turnover will go down, particularly in sales*
- *Attrition in the first 3-6 months of employment will be substantially reduced*
- *Productivity of new employees will become measurably better much sooner*

Most importantly, you'll have a far better feeling for the capabilities and potential of your sales force, in order to hire and develop individuals that will boost your business for the long-run.

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