



Hire for attitude



Don't tell me what to do, and don't tell me what to say. *By Elvira Riccardi*

According to Mark Murphy, CEO, Leadership IQ, "46% of newly hired employees fail within 18 months, while only 19% will achieve unequivocal success."

Perhaps more surprising, however, in Murphy's recent case study of 20,000 new hires across a range of corporates was the fact that a mere 11% of these failed due to a lack of technical competence. The dominant reasons for failure came down to attitude rather than skill and manifested as follows:

- **Coachability (26%):** the ability to accept and implement feedback;
- **Emotional intelligence (23%):** the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and accurately assess others' emotions;
- **Motivation (17%):** sufficient drive to achieve one's full potential;
- **Temperament (15%):** attitude and personality suited to the particular job and work environment; and
- **Technical competence (11%).**

Clearly, attitude plays a major role in the success or failure of new hires but, given the high rate of failure of new hires, traditional recruitment practices must be falling short when it comes to identifying and hiring for attitude, for a number of reasons:

Interview questions are often familiar and the answers rehearsed. Questions that allow for rehearsed answers do not reveal attitude. I know that if I go to an interview today, for instance, I had better have a good idea of my strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses? Not my true weaknesses, but rather something that can be perceived as a strength – like the fact that I am definitely a workaholic.

Secondly, in my years of service in the industry, I have seen interview techniques evolve – largely in favour of becoming more technical. Managers and consultants alike use impractical interview guidelines from which candidates are scored based on how close they come to pre-determined answers with almost complete disregard for personality and attitude.

In an environment with progressively inflexible labour laws, logic dictates that we should be applying more care when making hiring decisions that are both expensive and time consuming to unravel.

So how does one successfully "hire for attitude"? Determine the kind of attitude you are looking for. What are the key attributes and characteristics of your top performers? These should both constitute your corporate values, and form the basis of what you look for in future hires.

Here are five non-negotiables for successful hiring for attitude:

1 Establish your corporate's core values. Ensure that these are aligned to measured common attributes of your top performers and ensure that everyone in your enterprise is on the same page in this regard. Design and train your employees to hire on these attributes.

Likewise, establish common attributes of failed hires and ensure that your employees are trained to avoid these at all costs and have methodologies in place in your interviews to identify these.

2 Don't take for granted that your hiring managers know how to interview – take time to ensure that they do. Invest in external interview training and avoid bad habits and tired internal methodologies being passed on to new hires.

3 Prepare for every interview. This is crucial! Have clearly defined objectives and ensure you have covered them all by the end of the interview. Don't be seduced by the glitz and glamour of the CV in front of you. Make sure you have eliminated any leading, closed or standard questions.

If you are using targeted selection methodologies, ensure that you have spent some time engineering these to suit the attributes of the candidate you

want to assess. Stay away from hypothetical questions. Establish past behaviour.

4 Do not compromise on your standards. We are continually under threat of the 'skill shortage' and, as a result, managers are forgiving critical shortcomings in terms of attitude. Always hire in accordance with your organisation's values and standard, and you will be assured of hiring high performers.

5 Put the source back into resourcing. From the initial candidate experience to onboarding right through to talent pipelining, remember that you are 'sourcing' the right skill and attitude for your organisation, not simply filling holes.

Hiring according to your organisation's corporate culture, if it has been defined with your current top performers in mind, will better ensure successful hires. Remember, skill can be taught, attitude can not. ■

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