Hiring: Do It the Steve Jobs Way

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Jim was the perfect candidate with many years of solid experience as a professional sales rep, and he had an obvious talent of persuasion and communication skills. But the hiring manager had some strong reservations during the interview. Jim's strong focus on results 'right now' and a certain aggressiveness that could probably overwhelm or upset clients were some of the weaknesses he was concerned about.

In regards to Jim's focus on the purposes of the company, its role in the community, the vital importance of innovation and unselfish dedication to excellence, he did the perfect job. He sold himself like never before and got hired.

Four months later, Jim was fired for lack of vision, lack of dedication and worst of all, for his lack of honesty in his intentions.

The manager knew he had to hire "the Steve Jobs way," but had no real clue as to how to do it. He hired what he saw and what he heard "at the moment." He was trapped into Jim's salesmanship talent. And he was fooled by Jim's hidden intentions: to get the job, "no matter what needs to be said…"

Steve Jobs' Hiring Philosophy

Steve Jobs was an amazing and unconventional leader in many respects. His reputation as the best entrepreneur of our time can be summarized in a few words:

he and his top execs never compromised with the talents and qualifications required of their employees. He personally interviewed over 5,000 applicants during his career. He and his executives considered very different qualities in people than most business owners do. When you thoroughly analyze Apple's philosophy of hiring, you find out that there have always been fundamental, un-compromising attributes needed to get a job at Apple, Inc.

You too can apply these attributes when you look at attracting top players and ensure you avoid trouble makers. To help you in the hiring process, here are the main "Apple selection attributes."

(1) Vision-minded. Everyone joining the company must have a clear picture of its management vision -- and fully agree to fight for it, to defend it and to live with it every day. Applicants who do not seem to get it are systematically rejected. When you hire people who don't seem to agree with, or care about your company vision, you are potentially employing future enemies.

(2) Innovation-minded. Steve Jobs always emphasized the vital importance of hiring people who are innovative -- willing to create something from nothing. Applicants are first chosen for their ability and willingness to constantly create, rather than for their technical competence.

(3) Future-minded. Employees at Apple are driven by their leader's vision of the future and they contribute everyday to creating the future, more than just beating the competition. Each of them owns the future of the market because they know they can contribute to creating it. The eagerness to create, not follow the future is a vital attribute observed in top players, no matter the industry.

(4) Passion-minded. Steve Jobs' first principle is: "Do what you love." People are hired because they love the product, the company and its vision. Applicants who do not demonstrate a genuine passion and "love" for the company's purposes and business philosophy will never make it.

(5) Contribution-minded. A statement given by an Apple recruiter is clear enough: "We didn't want someone who desired to retire with a gold watch. We wanted entrepreneurs, demonstrated winners, high-energy contributors who defined their previous role in terms of what they contributed and not what they titles were."

(6) Engagement-minded. Over two thirds of Americans are not engaged in their workplace. Apple management is strict on employees' level of commitment. Committed individuals who are inspired by a grand purpose make the whole difference in the most competitive conditions.

(7) Excellence-minded. Steve Jobs was known for his passion of perfection. The company always tries things out until they are perfectly done. The same attitude is expected of every collaborator. Applicants who do not share that passion for excellence do not have a chance.

Other Critical Attributes to Evaluate

You will notice that these seven points enforced in the Apple's personnel selection are all personality-related attributes, also called soft skills. They do not always guarantee performance. But the chance of selecting productive people is at least 200 percent higher when focusing on these vital soft skills. It is very well known that recruiters who focus on soft skills in their personnel selection process are, on average, 50 percent more effective in selecting top players.

So, in order to avoid falling in the momentary personality trap – as the hiring manager in the above example did, you should also focus on the following two*basic*soft skills:

Honesty. Did you know that one third of all business failures in the USA are due to employee theft? Also, 95 percent of all US companies are victims of theft and yet only 10 percent ever discover it. So this is definitely a crucial criterion to evaluate. Everybody recognizes the importance of honesty so it would make sense to evaluate it PRIOR to evaluating any other soft skill, wouldn't it?

There are strong indicators which allow you to precisely evaluate honesty. Here are just a few: gaps in the resume, contradictory data between the resume and your standard job application, negative reaction or embarrassment from the applicant to your challenging questions and lack of accuracy in applicant's explanations of previous achievements.

Willingness. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than 87 percent of employee failures are due to unwillingness to do the job. You can't simply force someone to do something if they do not want to. Such persons will do what you want in order to keep their job or to avoid penalties. But they will not really put their heart into it.

Most applicants will tell you that they are willing, of course. The key to finding out if they are honest is to ask them to prove it. Challenge them to demonstrate that they have been willing to work hard, learn something new, question their old habits, work under tough conditions, etc… The way you do this is simply by asking them to give you specific examples when they had to display such willingness.

So, hire the Steve Job's way, by all means. But don't forget these two basic attributes in the same process. inform applicants that your company values and management philosophy imply honesty and willingness/positive attitude as primary selection criteria, no matter the position -- lack of either is enough to be considered unqualified!

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