

Why you should hire attitude over experience

By Auscar Wambiya

As the National and County Governments settle down to hire human resource that will drive their agenda for the next five years, one question lingers; how does the modern-day employer decide what sort of person is right for his/her team? If you ask the average human resource manager that question today, you'll find he's probably working on an unspoken assumption – the candidate's experience should match the job specifications as closely as possible. Human Resource practitioners have been trained to think that employee selection is like finding a key for a lock – an exact fit opens the door to top performance. And for them, that exact fit is found by comparing a candidate's resume to the knowledge, abilities and skills the job requires.

But in the constantly changing and volatile modern-day work place, where it is important that employees adapt quickly to new ideas and where you will hire for experience only to learn that the person you hired didn't fit in with your team or your company culture, you need to use another criterion than past performance. Empirical evidence has confirmed that hiring for the right attitudes assures a much better fit than hiring for the right experience.

Laurence Haughton in his book, *It's Not What You Say It's What You Do*, answers the critical question of; how do you determine the right attitudes of a potential employee during hiring? Studies have also now revealed that top employees in results delivery and execution share five key characteristics that have nothing to do with experience and everything to do with the right attitudes for employee success. The modern-day employer must look out for these characteristics during employee recruitment. They include learning agility, ability to deal with ambiguity, influence over others ability to work without supervision and great networking skills. Let us look at each briefly.

Learning agility is critical in the modern knowledge economy, more than at any other time in history, as the first key attitude to hire. Top performers are people with the attitude to catch up quickly and have the ability to switch direction at a moment's notice based on new information and capable of unlearning what is widely accepted as the norm in order to learn afresh. Look out for people who have enough self - worth to consider change, see the big picture and be pragmatic in seeking new knowledge to make even better decisions into the future.

The second attitude being the ability to deal with ambiguity means a lack of anxiety in high pressure, fast changing situations. It is the potential to make decisions without having all the data and without obsessing over uncertainty. Look out for individuals who are open, broadminded curious, insightful and original in their thinking to handle the ambiguous modern work place. Highly conservative, imitative and overly cautious behaviour shows a lack of this ability to deal with ambiguity and should send a signal. They are more comfortable with the status quo and are used to 'a certain way' which may not be useful when dealing with 'a new way' at the modern work place.

How about influence over others especially in presentations that require leadership? This third right attitude means a lot of ego drive which is that overwhelming desire to convince others, to get agreement and close the deal in any transaction whatsoever. These individuals are great on their feet, able to phrase their ideas convincingly even during interviews and are quick in offering solutions, not lamenting over conditions. They usually are largely agreeable with the teammates, extrovert in characteristic and emotionally stable enough to handle disagreeable

team members without being disagreeable themselves. They are open to everything and attached to nothing in their outlook to life.

The fourth attitude to hire is most difficult one; ability to work without supervision. The modern workplace has a fast and a loose culture. Those who are self-motivated and able to do well without intense supervision will outperform those who need more supervision. Look out for generally committed individuals with the willingness to deal with unpleasant or demanding responsibilities, live up to other's expectations and go outside their comfort zone without being pushed, cajoled or pressured to do so. They also use personal discretion to juggle priorities.

The fifth and final important trait to look out for in order to recruit individuals with the right attitude instead of a wide experience is good networking skills. The modern workplace requires a lot of cooperation and partnerships to get things done. One department must rely on another department, who sometimes do not answer to the same boss, to get things done. Individuals with good networking skills possess strong social skills like the ability to win the support of others as well as an ability to persevere after being told no many times. Both employers and employees will find these attitude skills very useful in the modern work place.

As recently as the 1970s, it was possible to compose a working life centred around the steady accumulation of experience, and be valued in the workplace for that experience, for what you have become. But, as the sociologist Richard Sennett has shown in his studies of contemporary work, it has become difficult to experience the repose of any such settled identity. The ideal of being experienced has given way to the ideal of being flexible in attitude. What is demanded now is an all-purpose intelligence, the kind one is certified to have by admission to an elite university, not anything in particular that you might have learned along the way. You have to be ready to reinvent yourself at any time.

During recruitment therefore, it is important for Human Resource Management to plan the interview in advance and give it enough time. It would also be important to get the potential employees talking freely in order to reveal more about themselves in the process helping the Human Resource Management know the above attitude areas. Human Resource Management should also ask about what the potential employees did previously and not just what they think need to be done in future. That way, the interview moves from theory to practice and tests previous attitudes to work and not just experience of work. Go yee and recruit based on attitudes, therefrom.

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