

# Talent+<sup>®</sup>

THE SCIENCE OF TALENT<sup>®</sup>

## Lessons for the Monday-Morning Talent Scout

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In football, you turn to your starters to get the ball across the goal line. In sales, you count on your closers. The idea is the same: lead with your best.

Taking this game day approach into the business world involves similar rules of engagement: Who's on your roster? What are their strengths? Where will they fit best to make the most impact? Whether players or salespeople, if you start with the right talent, put this talent in the right role, and then invest appropriately, the person will score goals along with the team. This concept is expressed through the Growth Formula:

$$[\text{Talent} + \text{Fit}] \times \text{Investment} = \text{Growth}^{\circledR}$$

This is not a complicated formula, nor is it meant to be, but staying true to each step is easier said than done.

### **Select Hard, Manage Easy<sup>SM</sup>: The Pursuit of Talent**

The surest path to creating a culture of success is to select people hard-wired for success. Without the proper tools and discipline, most companies rely on traditional interviewing methods in their hiring process. However, in a typical interview setting it is difficult to determine critical characteristics of a candidate. Often these interviews are conducted with no preplanning or structure, and the conversation may drift away from the most relevant topics for assessing a candidate's fit with the position and the organization. Moreover, the manager conducting the interview may be as committed to "selling" the position or the company as they are to understanding the candidate. Finally, candidates who present well in a traditional job interview have a distinct advantage over those who do not, but strong interviewing skills do not always translate to outstanding job performance. Fortunately, tools exist to take the guesswork and subjectivity out of the selection interview.

To select the right person for a particular role, it's essential to identify the characteristics necessary for an employee's sustained success in that role, and then to ensure that the candidate possesses these characteristics. In using a structured interview methodology, a manager is able to learn about a person's "life themes" (that is, consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors), and then to compare the intensity of the candidate's themes with the intensities found in people who have demonstrated consistent success in the role.

The thoughts, feelings and behaviors measured in a structured interview are vividly reflected in a person's actions every day – both at work and at home. These traits are fully integrated in a person's character, and they generate spontaneous behavior that requires no conscious thought or effort on the part of the individual. A talent is by definition spontaneous and innate. Although it can be refined through coaching and training, it cannot be implanted into someone who lacks it. A talent should not be mistaken for a skill, which can be taught.

Most managers know from personal experience the difference between talented and non-talented employees, even if they have not fully acknowledged it. A salesperson with the fundamental talent for selling can outperform his or her less-talented colleagues by seven figures. As a real-world example, Talent Plus' structured interview methodology was used to measure the sales talent of people who were already working in sales for a hospitality organization. After measuring the employees' sales aptitude with the structured interview, the organization was able to compare the results between the people whose sales talent measured high on the interview and those whose talent measured low. The people with high talent sold an average of \$2.9 million per year, whereas those with low talent sold \$1.4 million per year on

average. This was a seven-figure difference on an individual level, but an eight-figure difference for the company when accounting for the entire sales team.

No coach worth their salt would recruit players to their team based on a conversation without seeing them in action, clocking their forty-yard dash or watching them kick through the uprights. Ideally, they want to see them play a game, engage with their teammates and react to their competitors, but they also look at concrete data that compares these players to other successful athletes. Managers assessing candidates try to get a feel for past performance through a resume, but of course a resume is a marketing document produced by the candidate, and it does not allow for a side-by-side comparison with other people. Because the structured interview methodology is based in statistical research and generates a quantifiable outcome, it allows for a tangible measure of a candidate's aptitude for a particular job, and for a comparison of one candidate with another.

### **The Law of Attraction**

In order to identify top candidates through a structured interview, managers need to first fill the candidate pipeline with viable options. Therefore, every leader who wants to create a world-class team must make recruitment a top priority and a daily discipline. In addition to the traditional sources used in recruiting, a manager can mine the wealth that is already in his or her organization. Talent knows talent, so the richest resources for finding candidates are the top performing employees who are already on the team. These people know what the job entails, they have hopefully been managed in such a way that they are loyal to the organization, and they want to work with people who are as dedicated as they are. Through their contacts of friends and family they likely know people of high ability and can make an initial assessment of

their fit for the culture. In most cases, these people have never been asked to generate names of possible job candidates.

There is a corollary to this talent law that every good coach knows: talent is attracted to talent. We often see this when the best players want to join a winning team. A few good draft picks can turn around the reputation of a team or an organization, causing other talented individuals to consider joining. Moreover, in the selection process, it can be beneficial for candidates to meet the team's best players so they can see the caliber of their prospective colleagues, and in turn, the employees can add their impressions to the hiring decision. Certainly the talent of the leader also sets the tone, and either attracts or repels the best people.

In essence, if you as a manager are unhappy with the caliber of candidates served up for your consideration, what are you personally doing to take ownership for seeking and actively recruiting the best out there?

### **Coaching All Players to Succeed: The Growth Formula**

So what if the selection decisions have already been made, and perhaps there were some compromises in the search for talent? Not every manager has the luxury of building a team from scratch, and there is little benefit that comes from laying the blame at the doorstep of a predecessor. Still, even with employees you have inherited, the Growth Formula remains the key to unlocking their full potential.

Dr. William E. Hall theorized that people only use about 15 percent of their potential. As an educational psychology professor at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, he dedicated his life to the study of excellence and human potential, ultimately helping to found strength development

theory and positive psychology through his ground-breaking work. He was also a co-founder of Talent Plus, and used this platform to help leaders not only discover their own talents, but also cultivate the talents of the people they manage. He knew that in order for talent to transform into performance (**Growth** for the company and the individual), that talent must be given the right platform (**Fit**) and then must also receive constant coaching and development (**Investment**).

Again, the formula is easy to embrace in theory, but hard to apply in the real world. One manager was struggling with a chronically “non-performing” salesperson on his team. This individual did not adhere to the structured processes or deadlines for filling out her paperwork. He tried to coach her about the importance of these processes, but the behavior did not change. To bewilder the manager further, this individual outperformed her peers almost seven-to-one; while she was able to sell \$7.5 million per year, the rest of the team hovered around \$1.2 million per year per person.

As much as this salesperson needed coaching, her manager needed it more. He focused on what she did not do well instead of her strengths. With gentle encouragement, he came to the realization that she was in fact doing what she was hired to do. The indicator of her performance was her sales number, not to mention that her clients loved her and referred others to her constantly. Her fit for the role was indisputable, as was evidenced in her ability to lap her competitors on the team, yet there was no mistaking the areas where she was not meeting expectations. Her manager came to realize that she did not need to fit every aspect of the role to be successful, and his attempts to zero in on her weaknesses did nothing to encourage her performance.

By changing the nature of his coaching investment in her, he was not only able to move past his own perception of her as a poor performer, he also gave her the support that she needed most. Through his change of heart and renewed commitment to invest in her, this salesperson doubled her sales the next year, and then again one more time, while her peers remained essentially where they had started. This is the Growth Formula in action.

This example highlights what was achieved when a top performer was able to do what she does best: she was already delivering good numbers, but multiplied her success with the right attention from her manager. The same principles can be applied to people who are struggling in other ways, and perhaps are not meeting performance expectations. The process begins with an objective assessment of the individual's natural talents in comparison with the talents that are required for success in the job. Using the structured interview methodology as a tool to assess these talents is the first important step. Still, what the manager does with this talent information will ultimately make the difference in transforming the individual.

### **Scoring the Goal: Building a Talent-Based Organization®**

To lead with your best, make the commitment to hold out for talent when selecting, developing and promoting your team. Although building a Talent-Based Organization (TBO®) that seeks and selects the best talent does not happen overnight, once you commit to hold out for talented people—and then take the necessary steps to develop, motivate and recognize them—your company will be rewarded. TBOs enjoy unforeseen levels of performance, but beyond that they see higher job satisfaction among associates and the increased job retention rate that comes with it. The company that selects for talent builds a culture of success, and wins the game.

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