

Intangibles important in interview, too



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This week's Insider is senior partner at Donahue/Patterson Associates Inc, a retained executive search firm with offices in downtown Chicago.

In many recruiting assignments, the selection of the final candidate hinges on rather intangible characteristics, often beyond the required experience called for in the job description. These intangible characteristics are qualitative in nature and frequently more difficult to recognize and appraise

Over the years, we have identified six important characteristics that are almost universally sought when hiring experienced employees:

Interpersonal/communication skills

It is difficult to interview a person who does not communicate well. These people often don't listen, they talk too much, are either too slow to answer questions or answer the wrong questions.

A person who communicates effectively will usually try to read the interviewer's style and then alter his/her own to be compatible with it. An interviewer will have a positive recollection of those who communicate well and will remember unfavorably those who have a distinguishing negative communication style. These may include excessive pauses (er, ahem), interruptions, hand gesturing or rambling.

Intellectual curiosity

Candidates possessing this intellectual curiosity will have lots of questions. Conversely, candidates with few questions are perceived as dull or lacking in knowledge (it takes knowledge to ask questions). Many candidates believe their questions must be profound and will, therefore, limit their questioning to only a few important ones.

Actually, the candidate who overwhelms the interviewer with questions always makes a more favorable impression, whether or not the questions are in-depth. Preparation is the key to asking questions, but the questioning process must also be spontaneous, playing off the interviewer's questions and comments.

Assertiveness

By being assertive, the candidate communicates strength, self-confidence and leadership. To be assertive, the candidate should take a stand, either directly or through the questions he asks. This lets the interviewer know that you are a person of depth and conviction and that you will stand up for what you believe.

Some candidates become overly assertive, however, and border on abrasive. This is an obvious disqualifier. You may get away with calling a spade a spade, but not a "blasted shovel." Try to be humbly assertive.

Adaptability/flexibility

A person who copes effectively during adversity is a valuable employee. Most organizations by definition are ever changing, confrontational, situational and occasionally disruptive. Dealing effectively with these issues normally requires an adaptable or flexible person.

You don't have to sacrifice your principles to adapt, just be prepared to compromise a bit more, and look at things more positively from your employer's point of view. You will be judged a reliable and cool-headed team person.

Sense of urgency

A candidate shows his sense of urgency by being on time (better to be a few minutes early) for the interview and presenting himself/herself as an interested party. Some candidates often present themselves as non-committal, or non-interested in the activity, rather hoping to be sold than to sell. These "tire kickers" are usually judged to be uninterested and passive candidates who rarely obtain an invitation for a second interview.

Enthusiasm and sincere interest almost always get noticed favorably by the interviewer. Your job in any interview is to first sell yourself; otherwise, nothing else will happen. Better to sell yourself and pass on an invitation to return than not get the invitation. You can also demonstrate a sense of urgency by using appropriate anecdotal stories during your interview, e.g., "I remember the time..."

Passion/enthusiasm

Employees who are passionate about what they do normally perform at a higher level and inspire those under and around them. They lead by example and motivate co-workers to greater effort. People who are enthusiastic in an interview setting are perceived as having the passion which all employers seek.

It is easy to get pumped up by an enthusiastic candidate, an edge-of-the-chair, expressive, almost gushing individual. This enthusiasm almost always overcompensates for some lack in the list of required qualifications. While almost too obvious to mention, it is always best to smile more, frown less.

There is nothing particularly magic or exclusive about any of these characteristics. They are the baggage of winners and impressive to all whose paths they cross. While they may be natural characteristics of some, they can be learned, practiced and habituated by all.

REFERENCE MATERIAL AND POINTS OF CONTACT

Books

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| “Rites of Passage” | John Lucht |
| “Directory of Executive Search Firms” | KENNEDY PUBLICATIONS |
| “Sharkproof” | Harvey MacKay |
| “The CareerMakers” | John Sibbald |

Websites

www.kennedyinfo.com (a terrific sortable database of search firms for mass emailing of your resume to selected search firms...look for the “Executive Agent” feature).

www.execunet.com (subscription-based generalized executive site for viewing high level position postings)

www.cfo.com CFO magazine site with postings. Free to seekers.

www.financeleaders.org Finance oriented

www.thefeng.org Finance oriented

www.netshare.com Similar to Execunet

www.bluesteps.com Service of the Association of Executive Search firms.

www.ritesite.com Site offered by John Lucht author of “Rites of Passage”.

www.cio.com

Professional Societies

www.cpcusociety.org (insurance)

www.shrm.org (human resources)

www.sae.org (automotive engineers)

www.afponline.org (financial professionals)

www.fei.org (Financial Executives Int'l) Membership required for certain functions.