Goals, vision and strategy, as important as they are to any organization, are irrelevant without the right people executing them. In fact, a great dream with the wrong team is a nightmare. There is nothing a leader can do that brings a bigger return than finding and developing the right people. What follows are nine points that make up the centerpiece of any effective recruiting, interviewing and hiring strategy.

Highly developed leaders should do the hiring. The Law of Attrac-
tion states that you attract into your business what you are, not what you want. On a scale of one to 10, if you have 4s conducting interviews, they will attract 2s and 3s. Lower level managers won’t bring anyone on board they see as a threat. They are looking for the easy-to-control, compliant candidate. Netscape Cofounder Marc Andreessen’s *Law of Crappy People* says that bad managers tend
to hire very bad employees because people anywhere close to their own abilities intimidate them.

**Dig deep into track record.** Look hard at former accomplishments in and out of the workplace because the greatest predictor of future performance is past performance. Past performance is not a guarantee, but it is the most telling indicator of what someone will do because winners tend to stay as winners unless the job or environment changes dramatically. The reverse of this is that losers tend to stay as losers unless the job or environment changes drastically. And don’t wear yourself out looking for the exception to this rule. If someone was average in his past two or three jobs, they’re probably not going to change in the U-Haul on the way to your place.

**Don’t confuse interview performance with job performance.** Keep emotions out of the interview and hiring process. A short phone interview before the in-person interview will help eliminate the visual impact of the first impression. When you get blown away by personalities, stereotypes and appearance, you stop assessing the candidate. You magnify their strengths, minimize their weaknesses and start selling the job too soon. There’s a significant difference between interview performance and job performance. Focus on hiring candidates who are good at doing the job, not
just good at getting it. Some have had plenty of practice with the latter.

**Use pre-structured interview questions.** Ask pre-structured, behavioral-based questions that delve into their past accomplishments, then follow up their answers by digging for specifics. This will weed out fluff and exaggeration. Stick to your questions and resist the temptation to talk too much. The candidate is on trial, not you. An interview should be a fact-finding expedition, not a casual conversation. Raise the caution flag when you feel yourself enjoying the interview process because it means your emotions are getting involved and you’re losing objectivity.

**Build your team around individual excellence, not harmony.** While harmony and camaraderie are important to every team, they should not be the first things you look for in a candidate. Great teams are built around individual excellence. You must have the talented people in place first. With a good coach at the helm and the right people on board, you’ll start winning. Harmony and camaraderie will be an extension of that success. After all, what good does it do you to have a bunch of harmonious 3s and 4s on your team who can’t get the job done? While the ship is sinking, they
may join hands and sing “Kumbaya,” but they won’t have what it takes to save the ship.

**Hire people wired for the work.** You can teach skills and knowledge, but you can’t teach talent; you have to hire it in. If you could teach talent there would be hundreds of Michael Jordans, Eric Claptons and Robert De Niros. Training the job skills and knowledge to someone void of talent is simply a form of damage control. You’ll get the person to the point where he won’t hurt you too bad, but he’ll never be excellent at his job because excellence is impossible without talent. Use predictive testing that gauge competencies—not preferences—to determine if someone has a talent for the job. These tests are no guarantee, but there is extensive research showing they are three times more likely to identify a talented candidate than when you hire without using them. While talent is a great head start, keep in mind it is only potential. There are plenty of talented people who never use their gifts. This is why you must dig into their track record to determine what they’ve done with their talent throughout their life.

**Make it tough to get on board.** The easier you make it for some-
one to join your company, the easier it is for them to leave it when they decide the grass is greener elsewhere. What people gain too easily, they esteem too lightly. On the other hand, when you conduct a rigorous and serious interview, the candidate appreciates the job more and is more likely to work hard to validate your confidence. The Marines are the only service branch that exceeds their recruitment quotas every year, and they do so with a fraction of the budget other branches use. How? They sell exclusivity. Not everyone can be one of them. You don’t join them strictly for what you get; you enlist because of what you have an opportunity to become. Find ways to sell exclusivity in your company.

Be proactive. There is no shortage of talented people in any city or marketplace. The world didn’t all of a sudden stop churning out talented people. It’s just that the most talented people already have jobs. Thus, develop a proactive strategy that markets to passive job candidates, those already gainfully employed elsewhere. Your Web site should be a recruitment post that allows people to apply online. It should display testimonials from happy workers and compelling job descriptions. Everyone in
your organization should be rewarded for referring and recruiting people into your workplace. You must lose the mentality that you’re “all filled up” because you’ll never build a pipeline of talent if the only time you recruit, interview and hire is when you need someone. Being proactive keeps you out of situations where you panic-hire the wrong person just to fill a hole. Remember, as desperation rises, standards fall.

If in doubt, keep looking. It is nearly incalculable to determine the cost inflicted on your organization when you bring the wrong person on board. Not only the cost in missed sales or production, but also the cost of broken momentum, lower morale, misuse of resources and your own diminished credibility. When in doubt, keep looking. A bird in the hand is not better than two in the bush if it’s the wrong bird. People are not your greatest asset; the right people are. Don’t settle too early, too cheaply.

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