Persistence - How to Hire Great People

It’s no secret that hiring is one of the biggest challenges of managing and growing a productive team. So why do we chronically underestimate the time and energy that we need to dedicate to this crucial task? Business owners frequently minimize the importance of hiring. It’s a “tertiary task” superficially unrelated to client work, and often triggered under duress: a huge new client project to ramp up for, the opening of a new office, or the exodus of a few great employees. For this reason, hiring often takes on a stressful tone and is executed hastily. Yet no decision can have a bigger impact on the direction of your work and the long-term success of your business.

Hiring exceptional people allows a leader to set strategic direction and then hand over incremental decisions to smart, capable team members. Letting people in the organization use their judgment turns out to be faster and cheaper - but only if you hire the right people and reward them for having the right attitude.

The trick is uncovering those talented and trustworthy people - and knowing what they look like when you find them. Here are a handful of tips:

**1. You cannot clone yourself.** One of the first obstacles in expanding your team is rewiring your brain. Subconsciously or not, you may be fixated on looking for someone with the skills, mannerisms, single-minded passion, and other useful qualities that mimic your own. Instead, look for a cocktail of complementary skills to balance your weaknesses. Seek a foundation of rudiments and a likeable and hard-working personality. There is no one who loves your work more than you.

**2. Persistence is golden.** There’s a rule of thumb called The Rule of 100. Assume you’ll need to make contact with 100 people in order to find 10 prospects to narrow to a pool of 3 great matches. Sometimes this is an overestimation, but the point is that finding the right person is usually a matter of persistence. Don’t stop looking if you’re having trouble finding the right fit, just keep looking.

**3. The best resource is your personal network.** Hands down the best source for locating a person that fits you and your company is your circle of contacts. It’s your job to communicate effectively to your network by being clear about what you’re looking for and the context of the hire. It helps to be specific when approaching your network to give them information that’s easy to act on.

**4. But… don’t forget to look beyond your network.** It is a common strategy (and a common mistake) to stick to your personal network to find quality people. Go beyond your circle of contacts. Make a list of people and companies you respect or admire and reach out to them for assistance. Always ask who you should speak to next to continue to expand your network concentrically outward.

**5. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior... but it’s not always obvious.** Often a person’s interests are found in the seams of their resume or professional trajectory. Find out about hobbies, art projects or groups they started outside of work. This type of initiative will provide insight into how well a person works independently and if they’re prone to turning ideas action.

**6. Use “critical incident interviewing.”** This is an interview model that queries specific past events as a basis for discerning a person’s capabilities. It’s all about cascading questions. Start by asking about an incident, then peeling back the layers to evaluate the person’s thought process, judgment, and how he or she deals with a situation.

For example:

* “Tell me about a time you disagreed with your supervisor on a creative issue.”
* “Walk me through the problem.”“What did you do about it?”
* “What led to that decision?”
* “Why do you think that was effective?”
* “What was the outcome?”

**7. Assign homework.** After a series of interviews, it is common practice for companies to assign a phantom project or problem to solve. Some even hand off a client assignment and compensate potential employees for their work. There’s no better way to predict performance than by having the opportunity to evaluate the work directly and get a feel for a prospect’s style and habits.

**8. Do great work and make great stuff... so the best people find you.** It’s no surprise that the best companies always have the easiest time hiring. That’s because people are clamoring to work for them. Strive to do mind-bendingly great work and the hiring will take care of itself!