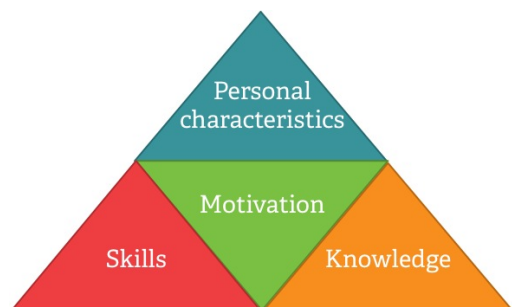


The Only 4 Dimensions That Matter In Hiring (& Why You're Probably Evaluating Them Wrong)



Does this sound familiar? You interview a candidate who has deep knowledge of your industry and checks off every box in the 'skills' section of the job description. They assure you that they are the perfect fit for the position, able to hit the ground running on day one. They look great on paper and seem to be excited about the job. You make an offer, the employee starts working, and soon you are inundated with red flags and problems coming at you from all sides.

What went wrong? You didn't assess the two most important criteria for any new hire: personal characteristics and motivation.

There are four key hiring dimensions: #1 personal characteristics, #2 motivation, #3 skills and #4 knowledge. In the above scenario, the focus was on just skills and knowledge. And while these are still critical to predicting the success of a potential hire, they should take a backseat to personal characteristics and motivation.

For the most comprehensive picture of a potential candidate, you have to **look at all four dimensions, in this order of importance:**

1. Personal characteristics are just that—core to one's personal character. They are what make a person who they are, so for all practical purposes they are unchangeable (or at least too difficult to realistically change in a business context). After all, you can teach a chicken to climb a tree, but you're better off getting a squirrel in the first place.

When I'm evaluating personal characteristics, I focus on:

- Integrity
- Intelligence
- Judgment
- Passion
- Strong communicator

- Initiative
- Energy

These characteristics, at least for me, are deal-breakers. It doesn't matter if I'm talking to the most experienced, most talented web developer in the Northern Hemisphere; if she isn't a strong communicator, or he doesn't have good judgment, nothing else matters. How do you assess these behaviors? That's another fascinating topic for another post.

2. Motivation is next on the list. As with personal characteristics, this is often deeply embedded and therefore difficult to change. Motivation is often the best determinant of whether the person is a good fit for the role (and vice versa). Because preferences about work environments, stress levels, challenges and team dynamics can vary greatly, misalignment in this area is one of the primary causes of job dissatisfaction and under performance.

For oDesk, this means finding people who get excited about our mission, who like challenges, and who want to make an impact on the company and the world. Some people are energized by this environment; those are the ones we look for. For some, targeting impact and facing challenges drains energy, leading to unhappiness on both sides.

One of the reasons motivation is so important is that people who are a great fit with the role and environment will find much more personal growth as they rise to the challenge of a job they enjoy.

3. Skills—which sit on the secondary tier of dimensions—can't be overlooked entirely, but they do require some reframing.

Most people think of skills in terms of job-specific expertise (graphic design, programming languages, etc.). While those job-specific skills do matter, they are much easier to learn once in a role than the more foundational skills you should be evaluating first: skills like communication, project management, organization, the ability to handle rapid context switches, etc.

As long as those foundational skills are present—and the position is flexible enough to support learning additional skills along the way—the skills dimension can often be considered met (of course there are some exceptions -- you won't be training any surgeons on the job).

4. Knowledge is the least important dimension—not because it doesn't matter, but because it is the most easily changed (and is very likely to change anyway).

As a result, when evaluating this dimension, what's most important is not the knowledge that the candidate already has. Instead, assess their foundation and framework for gaining new knowledge, as well as how able and willing they are to do so.

As with skills, those who don't currently possess all the knowledge needed to be successful in a given

role can still be great candidates, as long as they have that foundation and the position provides the opportunity to gain knowledge as they go.

In my experience, placing too much emphasis on knowledge (at the expense of the other three dimensions) causes the majority of hiring mistakes. Remember, just because a candidate knows their domain inside and out doesn't mean they are a good team player or that they won't jump ship as soon as the tide turns.

At the end of the day...

... to determine whether a particular red flag or concern really matters in predicting a candidate's success, a good rule of thumb is to ask yourself: **can it be changed or learned? If the answer is no to both of those, spare yourself a hiring disaster and move on.**