

Rejuvenating Life at Work:

Hiring Positive Performers

By Michael Boyes

Part 1

When was the last time you gave serious thought to how you want to live your life? Most of us don't spend much time engineering our time and activities to ensure we live abundant lives.

Let's face it, work is a huge part of life. In our work we can experience personal poverty, also known as: *frustration, boredom, rejection and isolation*. Or, we can experience personal fulfillment, also known as: *productivity, value, self-expression and personal relationships*. Each of us can shape our work environment, but leaders hold additional power and responsibility to be a positive influence. Owners and managers have a special responsibility to themselves and others to create abundance for the people around them. In the coming months, we'll take a look at three ways leaders can make life at work rewarding:

- Hiring positive performers,
- Creating a productive climate, and
- Building high performance teams.

Hiring Positive Performers

Work colleagues and our relations with them are important factors in our success. But it's not easy to hire the right people for your team. The results are obvious, whether good or bad. And, it's the bad decisions we remember the most: constant turnover, unreliable performers, bad attitudes and people who just don't have what it takes. The effects of a "bad hire" are infectious and drag co-workers, customers and your company's livelihood down with them.

Though we tend to overlook them, “good hires” are also contagious people. Positive performers boost morale, raise team standards and create raving fan customers. Leaders can improve their chances of hiring positive performers by adopting three mindsets and three hiring practices.

Three Mindsets

We need to be productive, to express our talents, to be valued and to feel like we belong. This is also true of the hiring manager and prospective employee. When these needs are met at work, employees are committed and productive, which tells us something about how we should approach a hiring situation: The task is to figure out how both parties can meet their needs by joining forces. Otherwise, you endanger fulfilling the needs for yourself and your team.

• We are Explorers

The job interview is a meeting to discover all sorts of things about each other—just like a first date. You want to know who this person is: his talents, skills, accomplishments, shortfalls and dreams. Remember that these are things people guard closely and reveal with caution. People will respond during a safe, warm exchange of information, but will withdraw from cold scientific probes. Postpone your judgment and decision-making until after the interview.

• The candidate has valuable talents to offer

This is an important mindset because it impacts the respect we show for others and the quality of our decisions. Job interviews are intimidating situations. After all, the interviewer sits in judgment over the applicant and decides to either accept or reject her. The interviewer can discourage or encourage the candidate, regardless of her qualifications. While it is morally right and plain good business to be kind to others, there is more to this mindset.

A lot of research has shown that most hiring decisions are made within the first five minutes of an interview. That’s about enough time to answer the question, “Is she just like me?” It is not enough time to figure out whether an individual is qualified. You can’t learn about the unique talents this person

could bring to your company in just five minutes. But that is exactly what people tend to do. We stop collecting new information and start looking for data that “proves” our first impression. Meanwhile, we overlook the assets of the person in front of us. To guard against this error take two precautions:

- Search out a candidate’s talents, even if they don’t match your needs.
- When you start to form an impression, either good or bad, look for evidence to the contrary.

• Desire to support

A leader’s job is to support his team with the guidance, resources, training and encouragement needed to get the job done. Each team member needs a different type of and a varied amount of support. It’s logical for leaders to begin assessing needs and supporting candidates during the interview.

When comparing similarly qualified candidates, it’s important to consider how much support and training they may need. An unskilled applicant, with a little guidance, could be a stellar candidate in the future. Applicants with mismatched skills could be perfect for other jobs in your company. “Rejecting” a mismatched candidate and steering her in the right direction is the best, most supportive thing you can do for her. Remember, the support you offer applicants could generate some of the best PR your company receives.

Three Hiring Techniques

Once you’ve adopted those mindsets, you are in a good position to start the interviewing process. When it comes to interviewing, each of us has some “natural tendencies.”

- You may be like a deer in headlights, frozen with fear and indecision. You ask: How do I know what questions to ask; or how can I tell a smooth talker from positive performer?
- You may be a gunslinger, preparing little, if at all, for the interview because of your schedule or confidence in your own ability to spot a winner.
- Or, you may be like the scientist who has an intricate analysis planned: your spreadsheet is ready and you are set for a precise hiring decision.

If any of these descriptions fit you, you are heading down the wrong path. The interview techniques below will help you avoid the pitfalls associated with your style. While these require preparation, it is worth the effort. Preparing for an interview, especially if you are already short staffed, can be tough. Turnover costs money and estimates on the cost of replacing an employee range from a low of 1/3 to twice the annual salary for the position. When you consider the impact on customers and your reputation, the cost of hiring the wrong person is potentially unlimited. You wouldn’t think about spending \$10,000 without doing your homework, so why not spend some time preparing for the interview?

Here is a checklist to use when preparing for an interview:

1. List the major job duties and responsibilities.
2. Talk with employees about the rewards, work conditions and difficulties of the job.
3. Think through what it takes to fit into your company’s work culture.
4. Based on steps 1-3, list the talents, skills and certifications needed to adequately perform this job.
5. Group the non-technical qualifications into 5-7 categories, e.g., organizational skills, customer interaction, communication.
6. Talk with job-holders, team members and customers to identify specific examples of when a person demonstrated exceptional, average and poor performance in each skill category. Those examples will be your guide to good or poor performance.
7. Make a list of 20 things you want to know about the candidate based on the information gathered in the previous steps.
8. Divide the list into simple issues and those that require judgment. Gather data on the former in the application or through a telephone call. Gather the latter during an in-person interview.

PAR

A few years ago, I was one of two final candidates for a point-guard position

HIRING POSITIVE PERFORMERS

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in the NBA. In fact, I was competing against the same player, Muggsy Bogues, for the position on two different teams. The Clipper's manager asked us questions like: "Team play is critical around here, are you a good passer? What would you do when faced with a 3-2 defense? Gee, you're kinda short, how high can you jump?"

Our answers were the same.

- I am a great passer, everybody says so. I'd rather pass the ball and win, than score 50 points and lose.
- I've studied every defense in the league and can handle all of them.
- I've got a 46-inch vertical leap, and that's when I am wearing combat boots!

I got the job and reported to the Clippers' training camp, but I didn't last long.

The Hornet's manager took a different approach. He asked behavioral questions and insisted I talk only about things I had actually done. I had to answer every question by describing a past situation, the actions I had taken, and the results. He frequently asked me to talk about my most recent experiences only. I remember that there was one question in particular that knocked me out of the running.

"Tell me about the most recent time you had to make a risky judgment call?"

I couldn't think of anything else, so I talked about choosing orange flavored Gatorade over lime. Muggsy told a story about stealing the ball and making a behind the back pass to a teammate who dunked the ball! He got the job, and that same he year was the NBA's leading passer.

Okay, it's not a true story, but it does illustrate how you can to hire the right people. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. This means that we have a good chance of knowing how a person will perform and get along at work based on how and what he has done in the past. In the examples above, I was free to make-up good answers for the Clippers' manager. But for the Hornets, I had to recount actions I had

taken and how they turned-out. Muggsy could cite numerous examples of outstanding performance, and I could only talk about gulping down Gatorade. I'd say the Hornets got a much better player!

The formula for a good question is pretty simple: P + A + R = PAR.

P = Past Situation: Every response an applicant gives must include a description of the situation or context. What was the task or goal, how was it assigned, with whom did you work?

A = Action: What did the person actually do in that situation? Actions are things a person says or does that could be observed by a nearby person.

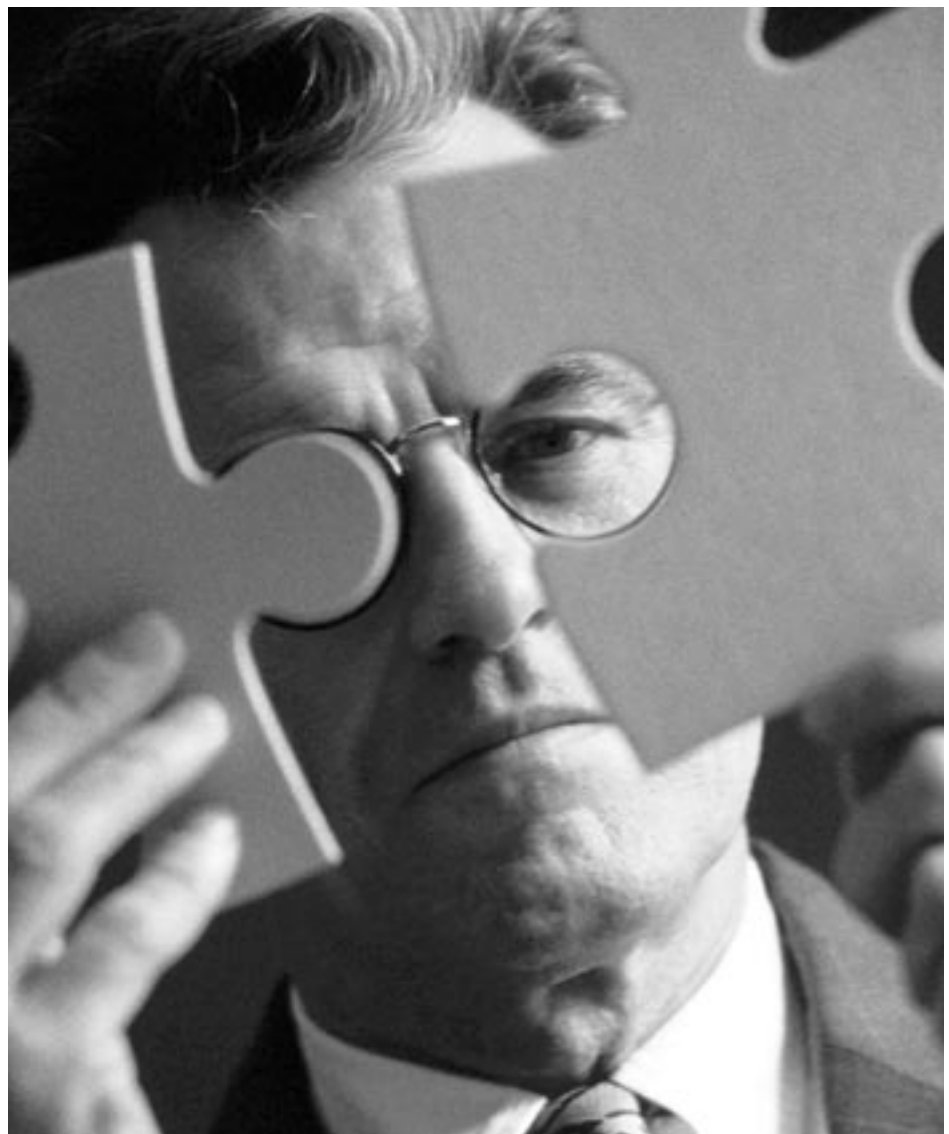
R = Result: What were the outcomes of the situation? What seems like a good action may not bring the desired result. The inverse is also true. Sometimes, unlikely behavior has a good outcome.

In those cases especially, the interviewer should probe for more PARs.

Lessons learned are important outcomes. If a person fails in one situation, but learns from it, takes action to improve or recovers, then that's important to know. That's why it is important to focus on a candidate's most recent experiences, and to get several PARs before you draw any conclusions.

Every candidate interviewed should be asked the same list of about 10 planned questions. Be ready to ask additional follow-up questions that force the candidate to discuss the details you need. It's normal for people to have a hard time giving PAR answers, but they will get the hang of it if you persist.

- Practice using the following phrases to begin your questions: Tell me about a time when you....



- Describe the last time...
- Tell me about a recent example of when you...
- How about the time before that?

Control the Discussion

Depending on the job, an interview should last between 45-90 minutes. You will need that much time to make an accurate assessment. If you tend to go much longer, you may need to assert more control over the discussion. Interviews should be efficient conversations that assess the fit between the applicant and the job. It is a two-way street, but the interviewer must keep the discussion on point and moving forward. To do so you will need some tools:

■ Lay the Groundwork

Start with an explanation of how you will conduct the interview. Include these points:

- I have prepared a list of questions that I need to ask, and we have about X minutes for our discussion.
- I'd like you to be candid so we can both make a good decision about your fit for this job.
- I may have to redirect the conversation at times. I may also gently cut you off at times, so please don't take it personally. It is normal.
- I will ask you a series of prepared questions that will help us cover all of the important topics and allow you to discuss your qualifications. After that, you will have an opportunity to ask questions.
- I am looking for answers that include an example of a real situation you were in, what you did and how it turned out.

■ Force it out of her

Finding actual examples can be difficult, especially when you ask for second and third examples of the same situation. When the candidate is "stumped," politely say that you'll wait. Give assurance that it is okay to think for a while. Meanwhile, sit silently, clean up your notes or jot down your observations. Just be sure to get an answer.

■ Politely Interrupt

This one doesn't need much explanation. Do it verbally, put your hand-up, do what you normally do when you interrupt someone.

Realistic Job Preview

Movie trailers build our hopes of seeing a really great film. Once we are hooked on the idea, theaters are guaranteed to get what they want—our money. If you are like me, you have asked yourself: "Why on earth did I go see that movie? I should have gotten up and left." In an effort to fill positions, interviewers sometimes put the most positive spin on the job. That's a bad idea. You don't want to do that to your employees because you want them to stick around. When jobs are not what they were expected to be, people lose motivation and may even quit unexpectedly.

As an employer and a future colleague, you want applicants to have an accurate picture of the job and the work environment. There are two reasons why people become dissatisfied: Either something doesn't meet their expectations, or it doesn't meet an important need. Since people usually do things expecting it will benefit them, meeting expectations is *very* important. I recommend giving serious candidates a realistic job preview. This will do two things:

- 1) Create an accurate picture of the job, reducing the chances of a let-down,
- 2) Allow the candidate to make an informed decision whether they would want the job.

Referrals from current employees are great because friends give an accurate picture of the job and refer people they want to work with. Here are some other ways you can give qualified candidates a realistic job preview (RJP):

- Written list of pros and cons about the job/workplace.
- Pictures of job.
- Ensure that they have a chance to talk with current employees for a realistic job preview.
- Ride alongs or one-day trials.
- Let them see and handle equipment used on the job.
- Introductory or job orientation films.

The mindset and practices described above will help you build a positive, productive workplace and are the foundation for effective leadership. People are attracted to leaders who are genuinely helpful and environments that support their needs. Chief among them are: the need to achieve, be productive, be valued and belong. People who are hired after a PAR interview and a realistic job preview will enter your company with confidence in you and in their decision. Your next challenge will be to maintain their trust and confidence.

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