

Hiring for Character and Training for Competence

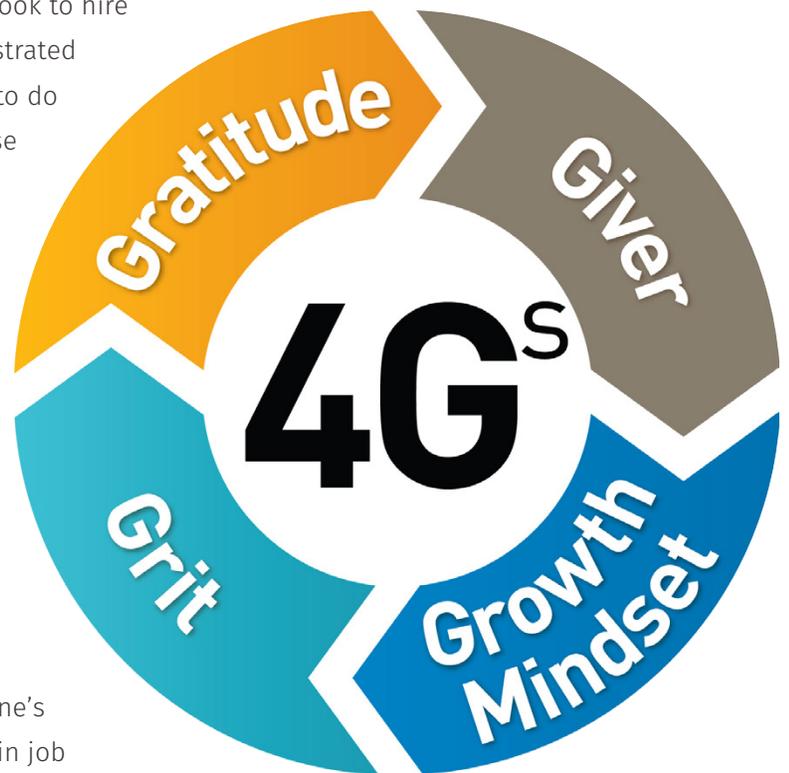
Two types of bias are common during the hiring process: confirmation bias and similar-to-me syndrome.^{1 2 3} Confirmation bias means that people look to confirm what they already know, rather than recognizing new facts. Employers with a confirmation bias risk judging a person in the first five minutes of a conversation based on what they already think, rather than on the candidate's true potential.

Similar-to-me syndrome means that employers look to hire someone like themselves. Studies have demonstrated that the best predictor of who gets hired has more to do with the characteristics of the interviewer than those of the interviewee.

The dilemma is that it's easy to evaluate what matters least (like demographic or age), but not what matters most (character). We need time to see how well someone works with others and how they respond to adversity and pressure.

The risk of bias can be mitigated, however, when everyone on the interview team looks for the same behaviors—giving, grit, growth mindset, and gratitude⁴ (4G's). The performance virtues defined by the 4G's are critical performance differentiators. Although it takes time to truly see someone's character, here are some qualities you can look for in job candidates:

- Givers often seek opportunities to serve others and are adept at building genuine trust. They develop strong networks of relationships that increase engagement and spark innovation. Look for individuals who share knowledge, help, and contribute to others without seeking anything.
- Gritty people demonstrate a strong passion that drives them to take on challenges or achieve excellence in whatever they do. They tend to have a strong sense of hope and plenty of courage to keep them going during tough times.
- People with a growth mindset believe you can get better, smarter, and more collaborative. They are always trying to figure out how to learn, grow, and develop themselves further.
- Grateful people are humble, self-aware, gracious, and wise. They know that success is seldom achieved only by one's own effort. Grateful people share achievement rather than taking personal credit.



They live a reflective, intentional, and self-disciplined life, seeking the positives in all situations.

Looking for the 4G's in potential employees is sound strategy. Giving and gratitude are pro-social behaviors that build trust. Grit and a growth mindset drive high performance. A secure base of trust and care helps team members be boldly innovative.

Performance Evaluations

Like hiring, evaluating employees is fraught with bias. Although evaluations are important, common practices do not drive high performance. In a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world, goals shift, strategies evolve, and priorities change. Yet annual performance evaluations assume a stable world. Goals are set, and results are measured 12 months later.

So what do we put in place of traditional annual performance evaluations? Google argues that compensation decisions should be separated from development decisions. Extrinsic compensation conversations simply don't mix with intrinsic coaching conversations. Replacing annual performance evaluations with ongoing feedback and coaching is a far more effective means to drive performance.⁵

Coaching

Good coaches help people uncover and develop their goals through self-discovery, driving them toward excellence. When conducting performance evaluations, consider taking a coaching approach by asking these two questions: (1) "What do you do well?" and (2) "How could you do more of it?" Just as we do not always know our weaknesses, we also do not always know our strengths.

The mission of good coaching is simple – help

someone reach their potential. Simple, but it is hard to reveal blind spots and rationalizations and promote self-discovery. They listen actively and look for strengths while avoiding judgment. When you focus on possibilities, you have more opportunities.

Good coaches focus on the words and emotions of the speaker and listen for tone, energy, and what isn't said. They ask "what" and "how" questions, rather than judgmental "why" questions.

For doctors, there is often a conflict when they take on leadership roles. To diagnose a patient, a doctor uses a "deficit-based" approach. Focusing on the problematic symptoms to find the hidden cause is an effective way to make a diagnosis. But to lead well, a doctor must use strength-based leadership strategies. She must become mindful and nimble in transitioning between the healing mode and the leadership mode.⁶

The antidote to deficit-based thinking is appreciative inquiry, which is a strength-based approach. Instead of asking, "What is the problem with this situation?" a deficit-based approach, consider the power of asking, "What opportunities do we have with the talent in this room?" This appreciative question invites different solutions. The way you ask the question informs the type of answer you get. Words create worlds.

Good coaching builds on the growth mindset. Commitment, effort, support, and training separate equally talented people. People with a growth mindset understand the power of "not yet," acknowledging that they have not yet achieved the results they want, but that with practice, effort, and smart strategies, they can become better and reach their goals.

Wisdom is Bred, Not Born

We are constantly changing as we reach different phases of life. The issue isn't whether we can change, but rather how we will change. Character is learned, practiced, and cultivated. We can learn to give, to develop grit, to develop a growth mindset, and to be grateful.

Virtue is developed best when we feel responsible for our own growth. We are more motivated and perform best when we leverage our strengths and manage our weaknesses. This is wisdom—realizing that there is always room for growth.

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