

# NOT JUST WHAT... BUT HOW

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## **“It’s not just What you know and do, but How you do it.”**

In the world of recruiting and employment, the one lesson we all seem to have to learn the hard way is that it’s not just **what** you know and do, but also **how** you do it. Many of us have recruited and hired superstars, gurus, or subject matter experts who wowed our socks off with their technical prowess, only to learn after the fact that they were hopelessly deficient as team players or communicators.

Simply defined, successful job performance is the result of the effective and appropriate application of relevant knowledge and experience. Having the relevant knowledge or experience listed on your resume may get you an exploratory phone screening interview. But unless you can demonstrate that you also have appropriately applied that knowledge in real-world situations, such credentials are no more than ink spots on a piece of paper.

Over the past couple of years, you have probably read about a number of high-profile athletic coaches, government and non-profit officials who have lost their jobs because of the “inflation” of their credentials in their resumes. Some of them may have been extremely capable with remarkable track records, but all that means nothing once it becomes known that they are egotistical liars.

Too often, I find managers put too much emphasis upon a candidate’s credentials as presented on the resume. They are easily impressed by claims of extensive education, training, and experience in the field of required expertise. Things like an advanced degree, diplomas from nationally renowned colleges and universities, high grade-point averages, or professional certifications may appear to be easy ways to assess a person’s level of professional or technical competence. However, impressive credentials do not guarantee successful job performance.

I once conducted a recruiter training workshop for an organization that hand-picked 75 of their best people to represent them at college recruiting events. For many years, this organization expressed a strong preference for students with a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or higher. The assumption was that strong academic performance would translate into strong job performance. However, apparently that assumption was baseless. Why? When I asked those 75 successful, highly-regarded employees to raise their hands if they had better than a 3.0 GPA when joining the company, only 4 did! And there were two others who acknowledged that they did not have a four-year college degree.

A successful hire is an employee who not only knows his or her stuff, but one who can adapt to the culture, build relationships, and effectively negotiate, collaborate, and communicate with the rest of organization and its customers. Most of us have had

to work with the independent, renegade, know-it-all who probably did more to deter or distract the team from its goal than to attain it. Rather than bringing strength to the team, the result was a weakening effect. Yes, knowledge is important, but without effective application, it can be virtually valueless to an organization.

When trying to identify, screen, and recruit new talent into an organization, assessing an individual's brain power and talent is relatively easy. Most resumes detail what the job seeker claims to know and what he or she has done. Job titles may suggest a level of competence and/or a track record of increasing responsibilities. Recent education and training may indicate up-to-date skills and, perhaps, some level of initiative or ambition. Specific accomplishments, when presented with measurable results, often reveal the most about the depth and breadth of a person's knowledge, skills, and abilities. These indicators must be explored and verified to ensure that the person can deliver what the paper promises.

The success of a potential new hire within your organization is very dependent upon that person's ability to fit into the structure, culture, and expectations of your organization. Exploring and gaining an understanding of a person's past behavior and performance in similar situations and environments is one of the best predictors of success. This isn't rocket science. If you learn that a person has a history of being pushy, demanding, or inflexible, would you want that person on your team? On the other hand, if a person worked on several successful teams and received specific recognition for being a key contributor to each team's success, would you want that person on your team? The answer should be obvious.

Learning a person's behavioral patterns must be discovered through a thorough interviewing process and then verified through reference checks with former supervisors and coworkers. Unfortunately, some people will say anything to get a job, even if it isn't true. The reference check, therefore, should be conducted by the decision maker with the same thoroughness as the interview. Delegating this task to some other party who has not participated in the interview or who has little knowledge of the performance expectations of the position makes corroboration or verification of the relevant behaviors virtually impossible.

Too many mistakes in hiring are made when we allow ourselves to be sold by the candidate's credentials, self-proclaimed accomplishments, and promises of performance to come. However, only when we have a clear picture of **what** AND **how** a person has performed in the past can we be truly confident in, and comfortable with, our hiring decision.