

3 Tricks To Make Talent Acquisition a Treat

By Joe Hunt

"Trick or Treat?"

It's a question that is top-of-mind for us all as October nears an end, and we prepare for those costumed, candy-grabbers to invade our front porches.

Consider for a moment the potential power of this simple yet poignant question. When applied to how we make business decisions, this seemingly childish inquiry can yield far more profitable gifts than those fun-sized Twix bars the Johnson's are giving out.

Am I being tricked by a candidate who interviews like a champion, but has produced lackluster results? Are there hidden treats to be found by ramping up talent development initiatives?

Asking analytical questions about your company's talent management practices with a simple conclusory classification – is this "Helpful or Harmful," "Productive or Reductive," or to borrow the timely phrase of the season, "Trick or Treat" – will enable you to improve inefficiencies across the board.

Here are three strategies to help ensure your talent practices result in treats rather than tricks.



1. Ask the Right Questions (of the right people)

As I alluded to in the introduction, the starting place for making informed decisions regarding talent is to ask the right questions. Most interviewers focus on the wrong things when questioning prospective hires. We tend to ask about the tangible aspects of the candidate's background – What have you accomplished? Where did you work? What is your education? While work history is important, it can also easily be gleaned from a resume.

The best way to determine if there will be a transitive property when it comes to a candidate's past performance is to first determine if the candidate possesses the key competencies required to succeed in the new role for which they are being considered. Secondly, you must determine if the candidate was a product of his environment, or if the environment was a product of the candidate's influence.

Here at **Hunt Executive Search**, we take great pride in the exceptional results we produce by asking the right questions. We effectively eliminate the biases created by the human component of hiring. By utilizing our expertly crafted **LeaderShift Architect** to identify each candidate's capacity and aptitude relative to the competencies required, we help our clients fill their vacancies with candidates who are promoted well above the industry average.

It is also imperative to make sure you are gleaned the answers to your questions from the appropriate sources. Typically, interviewers direct their questions to only the candidate and their references, who more times than not are previous supervisors.

Often times, more relevant information can be gained by talking with the candidate's peers or their direct reports. These sources tend to be more candid when it comes to giving an accurate account of whether the candidate was a change driver, or wave rider.

2. Don't Overpay for Past Performance

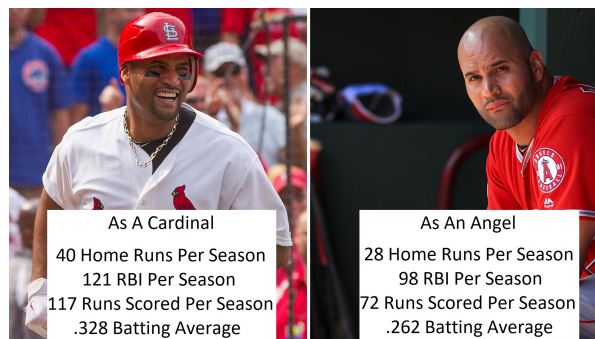
Building on what was discussed in trick number one, I cannot overstate the importance of trick number two.

Past performance is not a predictor of future success.

There are too many variables impacting success versus failure to conclude a candidate's previous results will absolutely correlate to success at a new company or in a new role. With the World Series in full swing, I think it's fitting to use baseball as a metaphor to illustrate this point.

Albert Pujols is a future MLB Hall-of-Famer. From 2001 to 2011 – as a St. Louis Cardinal – he was named Rookie of the Year, won 3 Most Valuable Player awards, and was a 9-time All-Star. During those 11 seasons, he was widely considered the best player in baseball, but his average salary of \$10.4 million was only about \$7 million above the MLB average for those years.

In 2012, Pujols signed a 10-year, \$240 million contract with the Los Angeles Angels. In his 6 seasons with the Angels to date, he has made only 1 All-Star team. This season, he was statistically one of the worst players in the sport. Pujols current average salary of \$24 million per season is roughly \$20 million more than the average player. With three more years on his contract, the Angels have considerable sunken costs in a talent who no longer is an asset to their team, and never produced for their organization anything close to the results he delivered for his previous team.

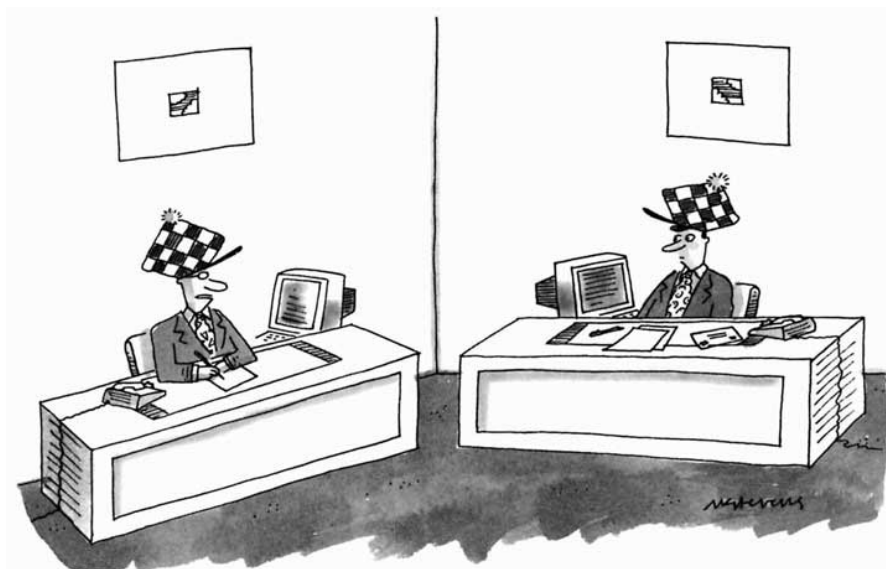


Ask yourself, “Is my company like the Cardinals?” Do you excel at identifying high potential “A-players” early, and maximizing the ROI they provide? Or are you the Angels – constantly chasing and over-paying those unicorns who look great in the other team's uniform, but never meet their lofty expectations once they get paid a premium by your organization?

3. Know Your Culture As Well As Your Competition's

We are all guilty from time to time of biases. Certain things simply pop off the page when you first glance at a candidate's resume. We see the names of Fortune 500 companies or Ivy League schools, and subconsciously form a positive opinion. While these credentials are impressive, there is a component to making successful hires that is far more important than hiring every Harvard grad you can get your hands on.

The companies who hire best, assess fit above all else. I often tell my clients, "The best candidate on paper is rarely the best candidate in reality." If the fit is wrong – whether we are talking about culture, leadership style, motivators, functional responsibilities, or expectations – it doesn't matter how many suffixes a person has behind their name, things are not going to work.



"I don't know how it started, either. All I know is that it's part of our corporate culture."

So how do you hire for fit. The first step, as Socrates would say, is to, "Know thyself." Understand what makes your company tick. What is your corporate culture? What type of people thrive in your environment? Where did the outside hires who failed come from?

Next you need to understand the same characteristics of your competitors, both larger and smaller. In competitive business environments, we are naturally drawn toward the desire to hire away the competition's best and brightest. In a perfect world, not only are you improving your company, but you also impede the competition. This strategy however, can backfire in epic fashion if fit is ignored. It doesn't matter how shiny or valuable that square peg is, if you only have round holes to put it in.

So as Halloween comes and goes, remember there is no bad time of the year to ask yourself if this next hire will be a Trick or Treat?

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