

Hiring for Attitude

by Andrew Cooke, [Growth & Profit Solutions](#)

How attitude is a good predictor of prospective employee success, and how you can identify those with the right attitude for your business.

The top challenge for CEOs according to a survey from the Conference Board (January 2013) is Human Capital – the ability to develop and acquire the right people, with the right skills needed to take to the business to the next level. But skills alone are not enough.

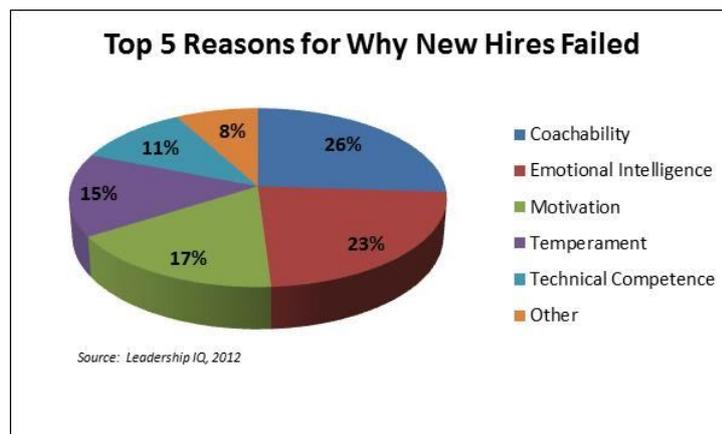


"Hire for Attitude, Train for Aptitude"

This is an old mantra which, if ignored, can be costly. Companies I have worked with have found that recruiting people with the right skills can be costly if they do not have the right 'attitude', where there is a lack of 'fit'. This is reflected in a study by Leadership IQ of over 20,000 new hires over 3 years which found that 46% of the people about to be hired will fail within the first 18 months on the job. And they won't fail for lack of skills but rather for *lack of attitude*.

Top 5 Reasons for Why New Hires Failed

The following are the top areas of failure (*i.e.*, were terminated, left under pressure, received disciplinary action or significantly negative performance reviews):



1. **Coachability** (26%): the lack of ability to accept and implement feedback from bosses, colleagues, customers and others.
2. **Emotional Intelligence** (23%): the lack of ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, and accurately assess others' emotions.
3. **Motivation** (17%): insufficient drive to achieve one's full potential and excel in the job.



4. **Temperament** (15%): attitude and personality not suited to the particular job and work environment.
5. **Technical Competence** (11%): functional or technical skills required to do the job.

The key point from this is that when new hires fail, and 46% of them will, 89% of the time it's because of attitude and only 11% of the time because of skill.

As such, the key predictor of a new hire's success or failure is their attitude, not their skills. As such we need to be clear on *what* attitude we are hiring for. To do this requires two steps:

- **Define the Specific Attitudes** – what are the attitudes that make your business different from the rest. This is both in terms of what is good (which you want) and what is bad (which you want to avoid).
- **Adapting the Hiring & Interviewing Process** – you need to make sure that you focus on these attitudes, so adapt how you do this as appropriate.

How Do We Do This?

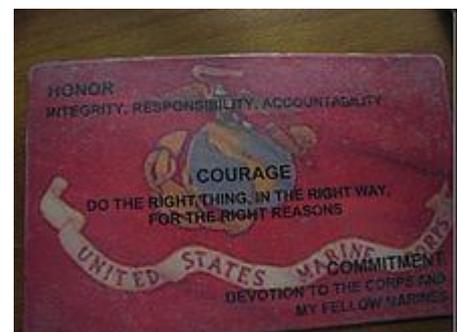
Define the Specific Attitudes

Attitudes in themselves are not visible or tangible. Where they are made apparent is in people's behaviours. How people behave is an active display of their attitudes. Their behavior should also be a reflection of the business' core values which provides guidance to people in the business. A good example of how the core values are made tangible, and the expected behavior (and hence attitudes) is shown below.

The US Marine Corp

The US Marine Corps has Core Values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The concept of these core values runs throughout all aspects of Marine life, beginning in recruit training and continuing into combat. These "warrior ethos" provide guidance to Marines in difficult ethics situations and as a reminder to provide good order and discipline. These values are defined as:

- **Honor** – integrity, responsibility and accountability.
- **Courage** – do the right thing, in the right way, for the right reasons.
- **Commitment** – devotion to the Corps and my fellow Marines.



Card given to recruits bearing the Marine Corp's Core Values



Adapting the Hiring & Interviewing Process

Too often, when interviewing, we focus on prospective employees' technical skills and competencies. Why? They are the easiest to assess but, as we have seen, they are a very poor predictor of the success or failure of a new employee.

When you look at jobs being advertised the experience, skills and qualification that are detailed it can be seen that the business advertising the position has the expectation that a perfect candidate will apply. This is about as far from reality as you can get. Realistically, there is no 'perfect candidate' and, as such, there can only be attitudes that are right for your business – they will never be perfect.

Tests for Finding the 'Right' Attitudes

1. **High Performers' Test** - what are the distinguishing attitudinal characteristics of your top performers. List up to 10 responses that reflect your business. For example:
 - They own the problem.
 - They always see problems as opportunities.
 - They are great listeners and communicators.
 - Etcetera.

2. **Low Performers' Test** - what are the distinguishing attitudinal characteristics of your low performers. List up to 10 responses that reflect your business. These are not just the opposite of the attitudinal characteristics that make a high performer. For example:
 - They avoid responsibility and are quick to blame.
 - They focus on themselves rather than others.
 - They do the bare minimum work required.
 - Etcetera.

Once you've got your two lists, conduct a quick assessment to make sure every point is on target. This can be done by asking yourself the following two questions about each attitude listed:

- How does this attitude add value or competitive advantage to this organization? (If the attitude brings no benefit to the organization, it doesn't belong on the list).

- Who cares about this attitude? (If the attitude doesn't bring benefit to your customers, it doesn't belong on the list)

Doing this provides insight into both what you want and what you don't want in the terms of attitudes and the associated behaviours. It then helps you to prepare for the interview by focusing on how they respond to questions around both these areas. However, *how* the questions are phrased is just as important as what the question is. You need to develop the



question with the kind of response that you are looking for in mind. But that is a separate article.

In summary, be clear on what values, attitudes and behaviours you want in your business, and which you want your new employees to exemplify in what they do and how they do it. Get clarity by distinguishing the attitudinal characteristics of both your top and low performers – this helps you to identify what you want from a potential employee, and what you don't want. Around this then adapt your interview and hiring process to ask the kind of questions that will help you elicit answers which will help you determine the prospective employee's values, attitudes and behaviours. Take this into account when you look at their technical skills, as it is their attitude that is a predictor of their skills – not their technical skills and competencies.

About Andrew Cooke and Growth & Profit Solutions ("GPS")

Andrew Cooke

An experienced executive coach, business facilitator, and management consultant Andrew has more than 25 years' national and international experience, working across a range of industries and businesses. He is passionate in helping people, teams and companies to unlock their individual and collective potential, enabling them to achieve their personal and business goals and, in turn, to help them unlock the potential of others.

Andrew has extensive experience in dealing with both blue-chip and start-up companies, and has had extensive international experience in the UK, the Middle East and Ireland across a range of industries.

He has post-graduate business qualifications with a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from the London Business School.

Growth & Profit Solutions("GPS")

Andrew runs [Growth & Profit Solutions](#), working with individuals, teams, groups and corporate so they can unlock their potential, that of others, and create a life and a job they love and choose to lead.

Through customized development programmes using experiential learning, backed by group workshops, individual one-to-one coaching and on-going support the individual and group development needs are addressed, the skills and capabilities are unlocked and the people can grow and achieve both personal and business outcomes on a sustainable basis. His blog, Growth and Profit, can be found at <http://growthandprofit.wordpress.com>.

To find out more about this visit the [GPS website](#) or contact Andrew at andrew.cooke@business-gps.com.au or on +61 (0)401 842 673.