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# Hiring an Oddball

Redefining Talent

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# Hiring an Oddball

## Redefining Talent

What is holding some organizations back from reaching their full potential? Why do large firms have trouble innovating and small firms lose their edge? How can firms exceed customers' expectations rather than being buried by them?

Years of working with many of the world's most prestigious financial services firms, and those hoping to enter the segment, have helped me see that companies need to break out of old patterns and forge new paths in order to stay ahead of today's competitors and tomorrow's challengers. They need to take risks, implement change, and continuously reevaluate and redefine what "talent" looks like.

### Redefine talent and expand your options

There are many ways to define talent. To score major hiring coups and breakthroughs, you need to be ready to hire people who break the mold, who look different, and those who have often been labeled (by others or themselves) as "oddballs".

Relying on the same types of people all the time will not enable your company to evolve. You need talent that thinks differently, asks new and unexpected questions and helps shape the future. If you can't make room in your vision for people who are not like you, your company may not reach its full potential. Given the reach of today's multinationals, the diversity of the global marketplace and the vast employment pool, businesses are doing themselves a disservice if they don't pick up talent from previously unexplored areas.

*"Talent is the key differentiator; so why aren't we looking at differentiated talent?"*

Some of the people who have contributed the most to today's businesses and inspired amazing innovation and growth have not fit the standard mold. We can all think of famous entrepreneurial drop-outs and programmers who toiled away in garages producing revolutionary ideas. Would any of them "fit" in your organization? Probably not,

but isn't their thinking exactly the type of ground-breaking approach needed? To not bring one of these talented "oddballs" into your business would be a regrettable mistake. But how are you supposed to find them? And how do you leverage their potential and let their creativity blossom?

## Change the process

Several companies have launched special programs to find innovators. In some cases, gamification is being used to attract and assess entry-level talent. There has been a marked increase in cross-pollinating people from different industries. Some initiatives are leveraging the talents of developmentally-challenged individuals to extraordinary results. And some Directors are more willing to take chances with unproven CEOs and even with their own peers on the Board.

We're not saying it will be easy. In fact, it is often necessary to adjust your hiring practices, screening techniques, and general due diligence to locate creative individuals and assess their unique backgrounds.

*"Sometimes you need to change the process to accommodate and attract the right person. Carrying on as you have won't change anything."*

## Talent dimensions

Though necessary, the common ways of evaluating job candidates – via resumes, interviews and references – provide only a small part of the picture. They enable you to see individuals in just two

dimensions. Instead, you need to search, assess and hire in three dimensions – to see beyond one's education, previous employers and interview responses to "who" they are, "how" they make decisions, and "what" unique traits they would bring to the organization. This has often been called "hiring an athlete" but usually relies too much on luck rather than a specific process.

You need to be proactive and seek out individuals who will make your company more successful over the long-term. Redefine what talent actually is, what it looks like, and how to harness it. As mentioned above, this might mean looking in other fields – e.g. technology, academia, medicine or law – to find bright and capable "thinkers" and "doers".

You need to analyze the decisions someone has made and the different paths they've taken to get where they are. Are they agile thinkers? Do they run to or from challenges? Will they stick to a project until a solution is found or will they give up? Are they strategic and creative? You should look for extraordinary characteristics instead of just checking the standard boxes. Focus on abilities and tendencies that will help address tomorrow's challenges.

## Evolving your talent view

We know what most people will say – once we hire them they won't stay, they simply will not fit in. Evolving your view of talent goes well beyond identifying and recruiting. You need to review your organizational structure, location strategies and, most importantly, "star system." In firms where the person with the biggest headcount gets the promotion or top compensation, those bringing the most creative ideas and shaping the future often get buried and frustrated. Do not let old practices and expectations blind you to great opportunities.

The following five points will help you evolve your talent acquisition strategy so it is focused on the talent of the future instead of the past:

### 1 Recognition

Redefine what talent is and what it looks like, learn where and how to look for it, and understand how to attract it. Align talent to business value.

### 2 Willingness to act and be proactive

Most companies tend to be slow moving, which can cause them to miss out on star performers who are in high demand. Be ready to act fast. A big part of this is moving from reactive to proactive talent management.

### 3 Take a calculated risk

Managers generally hire people who walk and talk like everyone else on the team. Be willing to “break the mold” and hire outside your comfort zone. Identify leaders who will embody and enforce this.

### 4 Create opportunity

Create ways to integrate people who think differently and to harness their full potential. Leverage existing talent to be the bridge across internal cultures. Allow “senior” and “star” to be defined differently than in the past.

### 5 Bring an open mind

Toss out past biases and concerns and seek solutions. Big firms need to work hard to remain competitive; smaller firms need to keep innovating and not become stale.

Updating your company’s talent management process will require organizational courage. It isn’t an option to sit idly by just because it is difficult. If you reconsider what talent is and discover new ways to find it and ensure it reaches its fullest potential, you will help reshape your company and be a trendsetter in your respective industry. Don’t wait for someone else to do it first.

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