How to Make People, Not Résumés, Your Hiring Priority

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When I consider acquiring a company, I try to get inside the heart of the person selling -- and allow him (or her) to get inside my own. I try to avoid being overly technical. When it comes to hiring people, on the other hand, there is no magic formula.

Yet it occurs to me that the two tasks are still related. In fact, “hiring” (acquiring) companies has a lot to teach us about how to hire employees.
For decades, companies and hiring managers have experimented with the hiring process, seeking the right sets of questions and qualifications that will guarantee successful hires. But, these days, companies are bucking the traditional trend of favoring education and experience.

In this vein, Google has actually tried using riddles to find top talent; and 60 percent of companies responding to one survey said they were testing candidates for culture fit. Penguin Random House is the latest company to join the latter movement toward "culture over credentials"; in January, the publisher boldly announced that it would no longer prioritize whether candidates had college degrees.

These aren’t the first companies to look past the résumé, but their actions hold a valuable lesson: Hiring isn’t just about the questions being asked by the company or the qualifications listed by the candidate -- it’s about people.

**Prioritizing 'the person'**

Experience and skills are important parts of a good candidate’s makeup, but a common mistake is thinking that those factors are the only important ones to consider. Technical skills can be taught, and experience can be gained in-house. Those skills can be tested as needed.

At Belfor, our culture is built on a foundation of integrity, commitment and loyalty, and we believe these innate skills can be the difference between an average employee and a great one.

At our job interviews, for instance, we believe that encouraging an applicant to share personal stories that demonstrate character may be more important than what’s on his or her résumé.
Meeting candidates face-to-face and getting a feel for them as people tells you how they will fit into the company culture. For startups with a small, intimate workforce, that factor is especially important.

Try these tactics to ensure that the person, not the résumé, is your priority:

1. Get into your candidates’ hearts.
Tell candidates your story, then ask about theirs. Science tells us that people love to talk about themselves; it activates the feel-good centers of their brains. So, actively listen to your candidates’ stories: Do they start with their professional life or real life? Do they allow you to know them or only what they can do?

2. Project humility.
As a startup leader, you know what it’s like to build something from the ground up, but an interview is not the time to toot your horn. Humility and the reminder that success can happen to anyone should be a big part of your hiring process. So often, companies use interviews to be boastful. But the company that remains grounded, humble and grateful will attract the best employees.

Research shows that both men and women are likely to favor those who are humble over those they perceive as conceited. One study even found that employees in its survey were more committed to and engaged with their jobs when they perceived their CEO as humble.

3. Ask open-ended questions.
Google might be infamous for its brainteasers, but it should be known for its current method of interviewing, which favors more open-ended questions to keep the focus on the interviewee.

So, have an open dialogue, and abolish any impression of a superior-inferior relationship. If candidates open up during interviews, they’ll probably do the same with those around them and spread that mentality throughout the team.
4. Peer into the future.
At a startup, you may not know where you’ll be in five years, so you may feel strange asking recruits where "they see themselves down the line." However, the answer can mean the difference between a short-term hire and a long-term investment.

After candidates respond, follow up by asking what happens next. Look for people who are always looking to the future. Don’t hire people who set strict boundaries for themselves with a narrow vision of success. You want people focused on a career -- not just a j-o-b.

By keeping the focus on the person and reviewing your company’s mission and values more than an applicant’s résumé during the interview process, you will increase your chances of finding the next great member of your company family.