



## Do you go by "Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills" philosophy?

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When you hear the phrase "hire for attitude" then you can be sure that the recruitment policy is to hire naive juniors. In recruitment-speak good attitude=naivety or unquestioning acceptance. Similarly, it appears only young and inexperienced employees are capable of possessing the "good attitude".

Take a look at the high profile corporate disasters over the last ten years or so and will find a surprising number of inexperienced naive juniors in key roles. Many of them are breaking the law (acting on instructions) but they don't know it or the moral compass is guided by what the boss told them to do. Prosecutors are not really interested in wide eyed 25 yr olds so if the instructions they received were all verbal.....!

The less commercially skilled or corrupt the hirer is the more they will recruit based on so called attitude. The more commercially skilled, commercially focused and experienced the recruiter is the more they will hire based on skills. Attitude is completely subjective measure however while skills are more objective.

Having been involved in a number of hiring assignments recently and completing a book which covers this subject I have witnessed firsthand "attitude hires". These include a 26yr old VP sales who had three years work experience; 26 yrs old VP international sales with 2 yrs work exp, 29 yr old EVP with 2 years work exp, 31 yr old CEO with 5 years work experience and many, many others. In each case the hirer claimed they hired these comprehensively unqualified people based on them having a "great attitude". Having met these timid "blush like schoolgirls" attitude hires it came across that the base issues were nothing to do with attitude but rather matters related to power and control of subordinates.

However this "attitude" thing also works in reverse. Any skilled and experienced individual (who by definition cannot be young and naive) is apparently incapable of having a "good attitude". The train for skills catch cry is also worthy of examination. Exactly what skills are being taught? Further, exactly what skills can a low skilled boss teach new hires? Not much it seems.

So the train for skills mantra is more a case of "follow this boiler plate" and presumably, "don't ask difficult questions".

On an assignment to assist a group of execs hire a new VP of marketing I was stunned at how lightweight these folks were. The CEO was 32 yrs old and the rest of the exec team was under the age of 30. It showed up big time, these folks were real amateurs but were being paid the big bucks (all were in the top %1 of income earners bracket) so were pretend



professionals. Bit like primary school kids trying to act at being grown ups in a school stage play.

It comes down to this. Take any youngish person who is worth, say \$50k per annum in an open competitive skis market and pay them four or five times that. It buys a lot of unquestioning obedience and puppy dog eyed loyalty. Now call this phenomenon a "good attitude". But a properly qualified and experienced person ( who will be older and somewhat more worldly wise) deserves the \$200k salary package, that's what they are currently getting paid so, what blushing childlike loyalty and unquestioning obedience will that person give.

I recently asked a CEO why he had hired such an unqualified junior as his EVP. "Because he will do exactly what I tell him, where else is he going to get a job that pays this much?"

Have a look around you and wherever you notice young unqualified attitude hires in well paying roles it is either a way of covering up for illegality or a paranoid, insecure exec management team attempting to make themselves look good by surrounding themselves with children.

### **David G**

I firmly believe that attitude is far more important than skills but the ideal situation is to have both.

I've made the mistake of employing too many enthusiastic and talented but inexperienced people in a team and the result was that I had a great team who enjoyed their jobs and really worked their socks off but who sometimes directed way too much energy at completely the wrong thing.

Bringing in a couple of more experienced people turned things around as they were able to tone down some of the extremes and also coach and guide the other team members.

I now believe in balance, I look for a team to have 1 or 2 highly skilled individuals and 1 or 2 junior members with great attitude and aptitude. For the majority I seek people with good skills and attitude who have room to develop.

The one thing I always avoid is bad attitude - however good they are they will always take away more than they give!

### **Eva Shakmak**

Attitude is literally spelt with a capita 'A' in the recruitment business both when we are looking for employees in our Company and candidates for our Clients.



Our experience however with Clients that Attitude is in itself not the only criteria as accountancy staff have to be able to demonstrate that they can 'do the job' and training is very rarely offered.

Lack of training is causing real problems in the accountancy field as Clients are always looking for 'young' team players but there are insufficient numbers of 'young' people being trained

### **Ian Hodge**

I wish it was possible, but in my experience there are few situations in which this is feasible, and they are:

- 1) A service industry setting where you usually have more space for on-the-job training
- 2) A smaller company with a strong owner/manager who is involved daily
- 3) A business where customer satisfaction is a subjective measure, not a value.

None of my corporate clients have ever uttered these words: in fact, one of the biggest mistakes corporations make when hiring is to focus too much on the CV and skills, and too little on other things (personality, personal situations etc). You will never see a company hiring a Senior Manager, saying "we are open on the experience as long as they have the right attitude"...

So, in short, I think it is a beautiful notion but it works only in very specific environments.

### **Andrea Colantoni**

No. It won't work in general, leaving your team with a lot of enthusiastic headless chickens, increased stress on the manager and little or no team confidence from the junior people. We forget that junior, less experienced people PREFER an environment where they have skilled people to lead them. I have adapted this philosophy over the years to be "Hire for skill, veto for attitude". This means consider both when hiring, the skills qualify the candidate whilst weak attitude excludes them. I never hire for just skill.

### **Chris Thornborrow**

It's all situational. You would not hire an automobile mechanic because he had the right attitude, but lacked the skills to fix cars. But for some jobs it does work. I'll give you an example from my life:

My first IT job was as a Help Desk Analyst for a major corporation. I answered an ad in the paper (yes, an actual newspaper!! This was a LONG time ago) that asked: "Can you USE 5 of the following 8 software applications?" The list contained things like Lotus 1-2-3, Microsoft Word, and so on. I was in sales at the time, and I could use 5 of the 8, so I responded to the ad. The position in question was a 2-3 month contract for something called a Help Desk



Analyst, which I never heard of... I interviewed, and they hired me immediately. The IT Manager and IT Director essentially told me the same reason why they selected me: They said that they could TEACH me the technical stuff I didn't know, like how to reset Novell passwords, and so on -- but they could NOT teach me the customer service skills the position required, and of which I had 7 years' experience. To them, it was more important to reassure the person on the phone that they would be fine, that their problem would be taken care of, and that they were important, than it was to speak techie-talk to them, fix the issue, and hang up.

The rest is history. I've been in IT for 12 1/2 years, now, and have been hired for nearly every position by using precisely those criteria. I tell the people with whom I interview: I may not know everything about your company or product or service; but I bring X-Y-Z skills to the table, and I am a VERY quick learner.

### **Paul Costello**

Yes, I believe in this philosophy, and I think people with the right attitude or personality can be taught just about any set of skills.

But this is true only for entry or junior level where we have lots of training happening for all kind of skill sets.

To talk about ground reality, I have seen people hiring skilled resources with a lot of Attitude (negative) and end up losing them within a month or so which again increases attrition.

But when they hire optimists with some basic skills they always see good results.

Again, this doesn't work at management level and also positions involving hardcore Technical Skills.

We cannot deny with the fact that companies have to invest on Trainings which is a must.

Kindly go through the PDF on below link which supports my answer.

### **Links:**

- <http://www.starttogether.org/docs/hiring.pdf>

### **Amit Trivedi**





There are only two questions in hiring: Can they do the job? Do we want to work with them? It has to be a big yes for both those. One has to be realistic about the learning curve and natural abilities, but that philosophy is basically correct.

### **Kevin Harville**

The question is the typical dilemma that every HR professional has in his/her mind. What with both the Attitude deteriorating and Skill levels going down in India.

One would prefer to have a balance of both, but if the attitude, aptitude and other cultural fit is good enough and technical skills being fair we should have an internal system to ensure that an efficient mechanism is in place to train, groom and mentor a person to the level that you would want them.

In the current scenario of "War for Talent" this is the best option that one could fall back on.

One should remember that this would be applicable wherein technical resources are in need and not for all industries and levels.

### **Siva Kumar**

Well it all depends on the attitude! My company made one such mistake, her skills were minimal- her attitude appeared "go getter" at first, but then no, wait- it seemed she was more of the "out to get at any cost" This cost them months of aggravation, etc.

I've met many people who are all attitude and show, and no real skill when push comes to shove. The contribution was nonexistent, so their presence worth little.

I find skills more important. Highly skilled doesn't need much attitude, but one should always be respectful of the coworkers and their respective talents.

### **Linda Fredrick**

The ground reality is that companies are pushed for time and resources to get services/products out in the market at the right time. Any delay would cost dearly. In this situation, we need to be reasonable and practical when it comes to hiring. We could have 4 situations:

- right skill/ right attitude: Best situation to be in, but rare.
- Right skill/ not a matching attitude: If there is ample skill available in the market, I would let the person go. Else converse with him/her and debate the justification for that attitude. Check if the person can be shaped up, or would change positively in the company's environment. If yes, I would go ahead.



- Not matching skill/ Right attitude: There has to be a basic ability and willingness to learn in the person (or I call it threshold skill level), and the company should also have the bandwidth/infrastructure to develop the person. I would go ahead only if the hiring manager is confident that he has time, resources and patience to let the person develop his skills. Again if there is ample skill available in the market, I would let the person go.

-not matching skill/ not matching attitude: Please show him/her the door :)

### **John Samuel**

One cannot have the cake and eat it too!! While the ideal situation would be to hire someone who has the best of attitude and the skills, thanks to various factors, attitude seems to have taken a back seat with prospective candidates. People quit jobs at the drop of a hat; and reasons stated are mostly "funny". I will go for someone who has a great attitude; skills can always be acquired.

### **Sivakumar J. Sharma**

Absolutely hire for attitude...if, by attitude, we're talking about a positive one that is in alignment with the company's values, goals, and mission. Granted, there are certain positions that require existing skills where a steep learning curve would be prohibitive...but, given an ideal attitude, the candidate would admit this and agree it's not a good fit. A good attitude doesn't mean you can do anything, but it does mean that you can do everything better than you can with a bad attitude.

### **Mike Gavette**

