

Forget the First Impression: Here's What I Look For in a Candidate

Posted On Nov 23, Posted by [Paul Croteau](#) Category [Talent Management](#)

Have you ever been discouraged and dismayed when you found that a recent hire was not who you thought they were? Where did you go wrong? Was the problem a set of poor interview questions? Did you misinterpret the candidate's responses? Were your interviewers not effectively trained?

Surprisingly, the answer is probably none of the above. When a candidate turns out to be a disappointment, it's often because interviewers formed their views based on a candidate's first impression. These first impressions frequently focus on outward appearances such as how an individual walks or talks, whether or not they smile or their handshake is strong or weak, their hands hot or cold or whether or not their voice and body language exudes confidence and sincerity.

Interviewers often give too much weight and credit in their deliberations to the "good feeling" an interviewer gains about a candidate from their one interview encounter. While our parents taught us to concentrate on making a good first impression, first impressions are not very accurate in predicting job success.

In order to not be fooled by first impressions, an interviewer must get into the soul of their candidates. In other words, they need to examine a candidate's true character and identify what really drives him/her. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a well-known American lecturer and author, wrote, "character is higher than intellect." This is also the approach that I take in my executive search practice.

What do I look for in a candidate? First of all, an ideal candidate is someone who is consistently the same person both privately and publicly; someone who exhibits a number of character traits that allow them to quickly gain the confidence of others. They also need to demonstrate the ability to see the big picture of their industry/sector and to position their organization for any changes that are on the horizon.

Some of the other key character traits that I look for in senior executive candidates include a strong sense of self-awareness, someone who can stand tall during pressured times, a person who is willing to take calculated risks and has a strong sense of self-reliance. If the leader is in the business world, they need to have a strong sense of competitiveness and be persuasive enough to sell their ideas and dreams. They need to have a passion for what they do, creatively make things happen, be open to new ideas and have the courage to do the right thing.

How do I assess these character traits? Rather than focusing only on a single interview, my

approach is to conduct several assessment strategies. These strategies are then concluded with an individual psychometric assessment called the MERIT profile which measures the attitude, belief and commitment principles of personal leadership. This tool allows me to delve deeper into the soul of a candidate to gain insight into each person's personality, ability, motivation, leadership style and their ability to inspire and nurture their people.

A positive attitude, in my view, is critically important for a leader. After all, every day brings workplace challenges and obstacles that need to be overcome; many of these challenges are hard and very tough experiences. Beliefs and values, on the other hand, are important because they are the drivers of a leadership candidate's energy and, in turn, will help to propel an organization forward. Finally, a candidate's commitment to staying focused while managing change and inspiring others is also critical to both long-term individual and organizational success.

As indicated earlier, I sincerely believe that many situations of candidate disappointment result from a failure to look beyond first impressions. Therefore, take time delving into the character and personality of your candidates. If you need assistance, please feel free to give me a call.

Tags: [Recruitment](#) , [recruitment success](#) , [recruitment approaches](#) , [recruitment strategies](#) , [first impressions](#)