

## It's a Matter of Style - Looking Beyond Technical Competence



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Traditional interviews were meant to screen candidates who could type 60 words per minute, write Java code or conduct in-depth science experiments, and if they passed those hurdles or some technical testing, they were hired. But in this new economy, assessing technical competence alone just doesn't cut it. When it comes to hiring the right person, organizations do have to consider a variety of other factors, one of the most important being matching the candidate's style to the company's culture.

After years of witnessing and working through the stress companies go through when people don't "work out" or "fit" in organizations, I think I finally figured out why this happens. It's not just about the technical competence a candidate brings to the table - of course, that's a given - but it's more about the candidate's personality style and his or her match to the company culture.

My formula for success is:  
*technical skills + candidate's style + match to company culture = successful candidate*

Interviewers today have to make a focused effort to explore the candidate's

style and the organization's culture in addition to technical competence. Managers who have changed the way they interview have had greater success in finding these successful candidates who "fit."

Here's the line of questioning:

- If the candidate appears to be highly structured and organized, ask yourself "Will he/she have trouble working in a start-up organization?"
- If they prefer to work alone, ask yourself "Will they be happy in an organization that focuses on engaging the customer at all levels?"
- If they like working in a manufacturing operation, ask yourself "How will they be able to survive working in a cutting edge technology company?"

Make no mistake: None of these styles or cultures is bad - they just have to match!

As the hiring manager, you should be able to assess the technical competence of the candidates and know your company's culture - but you may need some help with identifying the candidate's style. So how do you do it?

We all remember our playground days and how we interacted with our peers. Well, that typically does not change as we become adults. Through my experience, I have been able to identify four easy-to-remember personality styles, which I have called The Playground Personalities®. Now, I don't want managers to stereotype or pigeon-hole candidates into these Playground Personalities® - but I recommend they use them as another data point when

assessing whether or not a candidate will be a good "fit" for the organization.

It's easy to assess the style of the candidate "on your feet." Don't miss the signs; People are very clear about their body language, use of words and their intentions, so watch and listen closely. Here are some clues to look for:

Peacemakers appreciate communication and collaboration. During the interview they will be polite, make definite eye contact, wait for the entire question to be asked before responding or will ask if their answer was sufficient.

Organizers are highly structured and decisive. If the candidate hands you a copy of their resume "just in case...", if he or she is exact and clear in his/her examples, if a portfolio is provided of his/her work for you to review - make no mistake, you are interviewing an Organizer!

Revolutionaries hate routine and schedules and prefer to adapt to the moment at hand. Their answers will be vivid and full of action stories. They will use humor and maybe even tell a joke! If you are interviewing a Revolutionary you'll know it because you'll find yourself saying, "Where did that come from?"

Steamrollers are smart, highly opinionated and can solve complex problems. You know you are interviewing a Steamroller because their answers may be complex, they will back-up their answers with theories and historical information and they may even challenge the interviewer!

At the end of the interview, reflect on the answers they gave that may have "bugged you" and take a closer look to

identify the candidate's style and match it to the organization's culture. For example, if your company is a start-up, did the candidate appear to be not easily rattled or could the lack of clarity drive him/her insane? Does the candidate like action and constant motion at work and your organization manufactures widgets?

Remember also that all of these Playground Personalities® are valued in the organization and you need to have a good balance between all of them in order for the organization to run smoothly. Too many of one type may tip the apple cart.

So the next time you are interviewing a candidate, refer to these helpful tips. Remember, evaluating candidates solely on their technical competence won't give you the whole picture. Look at his/her style and how it fits into your organization's culture - it works!

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