**Hire For Behavioral Patterns Not Qualifications**

By Mike Michalowicz

My best employee of all time was nicknamed Shaq. While his genetic gifts would have never landed him a spot on the New Jersey Nets (nicknames work like that), he worked for my company as a computer forensic examiner. When I hired him, Shaq was barely qualified to use a computer, let alone conduct detailed forensic examinations on hard drives that later had to stand up in court and pass the rigors of cross examination.

So why did I take him on? I hired Shaq because during his interview he clearly demonstrated that he was very intelligent, had a lot of energy and seemed to come out on the “glass half full” side of things during stressful situations. Because of these qualities, within three months of joining my company he was out in the field, conducting examinations on his own. Shaq had absorbed the training so fast that within a year of his hire he was testifying in court and handling our most complicated cases.

When hiring new employees, most recruiters consider qualifications first – and last. They’re looking for someone with the best education, the most experience and the most impressive skills. This is a mistake because you can teach an employee what you want them to know, you can give them the experience you want them to have, but you can’t change who they are on a fundamental level. Their attitude, values, willingness and work ethic are all ingrained in them.

The most effective way to hire fantastic, loyal employees who will fit into your company culture and help you meet your goals is to hire them for their inherent abilities (that which can’t be taught), such as personality, learning style and core values. You do this by identifying behavior patterns during the interview process.

I didn’t hire Shaq just because he exhibited the attributes I was looking for in an employee. I hired Shaq because during his interview he demonstrated that he had a pattern of making intelligent decisions, and was energetic and positive in his approach. People will behave as they have in the past. If you ask questions designed to identify the patterns, you can predict how prospective employees would behave in similar situations.

The interview technique isn’t easy because you have to be very careful not to pass judgment on their answers. If they tell you something that shocks or disturbs you, keep a straight face and use phrases such as, “That’s interesting… tell me more.” If your interviewee says, “I was class valedictorian,” you say, “That’s interesting… tell me more.” If the interviewee says “I killed the class valedictorian and buried him in my backyard,” you say, “That’s interesting… tell me more.” (And call the police as soon as the candidate leaves the building.)

Here’s how the interview process works:

You might ask, “In high school, which class did you like the least?” When the candidate tells you he hated English class you say, “That’s interesting… tell me more. Why didn’t you like English class?” “The teacher was a dictator. I had to follow rules that made no sense.”

Now that you have this first bit of information, you start looking for a pattern. “Okay, tell me which aspect of college you liked the least?” When the candidate tells you that he didn’t like the fraternities on campus you say, “That’s interesting… tell me more. Why didn’t you like them?” “Because we had to follow these crazy rules.”

Still looking for the pattern you ask, “What about your first job?” After you get through “tell me more,” the candidate says, “I loved my colleagues, but I couldn’t stand the bureaucracy. They had me filling out irrelevant forms all the time.”

A pattern is starting to become clear. Do you see it? This candidate doesn’t like rules. If your company depends on employees adhering to strict guidelines, he’s not a good fit. If, on the other hand, you’re looking for an independent type of person, he has potential.

This hiring practice takes time. Your interviews won’t be over in 15 minutes and you won’t hire employees based on shiny resumes and gut instinct. Instead, your interviews will probably last two hours, and you’ll make a decision based on your confidence that the candidate will behave exactly as you need him to – because now you know how he behaved in similar situations in the past. While it may take a bit longer up front, you’ll save time and money in the long run because this method reduces turnover and increases company morale.

Hire the candidate with the most potential to succeed in your company, regardless of experience. The right person will be able to handle anything you throw at them… and if they’re anything like Shaq, it will be nothing but net.