

RECRUIT OWNERS, NOT EMPLOYEES!

The three top issues that I seem to work with my executive clients on are Effective Recruiting, Maximizing Agent Production, and Time Management. Today I'd like to share some thoughts on how to better identify candidates that are more likely to succeed in our business.

Have you ever brought someone on as an agent, only to have them act like an employee? You told him he was an independent businessman. You explained to her that there were no benefits. You made it clear that their success depended on their own efforts. Yet,...

They begin to act as if someone else will be there to pick up the slack or cover them when they act irresponsibly. They will be casual with funds. They don't file license renewal paperwork in a timely fashion. They don't do what they say they will do and then complain about their finances. You know the kind I'm talking about.

Let's discuss some ideas on how to better weed out candidates with an "employee" mindset and more effectively identify candidates with an "owner" mindset. What we're talking about here is an art rather than a science.

Clues can be picked up from their past as well as through effective questioning. Obviously, a red flag ought to go up when you hear certain "employee" types of questions:

- What kind of benefits are provided?
(after knowing that they would be a "1099er")
- What kind of hours would I be working?
- Are there any paid vacations?

Usually we're sensitive to the kinds of questions that are plainly employee-oriented. But I find that in the absence of these blatantly employee-oriented questions, many District Managers, General Agents, etc. have difficulty in getting a clear sense of whether their candidate has an entrepreneurial perspective. Keep in mind that most candidates, naturally, will provide answers that they believe you want to hear or that they think they should give. If you ask whether they're prepared to work whatever hours it takes to succeed, the answer will almost always be "Yes". If you ask whether they have the self-discipline to be their own boss, the answer will almost always be "Yes". If you ask whether they'd be willing to work some evenings and weekends to succeed, the answer will almost always be "Yes". Understand that while some people will feel differently but give you the answer they think you want, many people truly don't know themselves well enough to give an honest answer about themselves. It's up to you to read between the lines and ask effective questions.

Using Their Background for Clues

Clearly, many people who consider a career in insurance come from a background of employment. Never having owned a business before isn't really an indication of their ability to succeed as an independent business person. However, in looking over their history, there are several things you can look for that can lead to clarifying questions:

- **Have they stayed in jobs for extended periods?** If they have, it may demonstrate loyalty and perseverance. While these are good traits, the job stability may also indicate a preference for employment rather than independence. Asking good clarification questions (below) can uncover their true feelings.
- **Have they changed jobs frequently?** If they have, it can show instability, poor self-discipline, and a tendency to have problems. On the other hand, it may reflect frustration with the employment environment and a desire to be self-directed and

independent. Again, asking good clarification questions (below) can help you decide which it is.

- **Have they ever owned a business before?** If they have, it demonstrates an entrepreneurial spark. Of course the question remains as to what happened to that business? Again, clarifying will help in evaluating its significance.

Clarifying Questions

The facts surrounding someone's past give us an idea of where they're coming from. However, their *feelings* and *thoughts* about their past experiences can offer a better insight into their make up. Some questions will be oriented towards clarifying past experiences and decisions; others are directed towards revealing their entrepreneurial thinking capacity. Here is a sampling of questions for your consideration. Clearly the full list is endless and varies with each situation. Use this list as a starting point in developing meaningful clarifying questions.

- You've had a great career in the xxxxxx industry, why would you want to leave it?
- Why wouldn't you want to find another position in the xxxxxxxx industry?
- How important is having benefits to your spouse?
- How would you market if you couldn't cold/warm call?
- How long do you think it will take to build this business up to the level of income you were making at your last job?
- How would you handle a policyholder who was unhappy about their new rates?
- Why do you think/feel you've changed jobs so often?
- What would you do differently in building that business (the prior one from their resume), if you had it to do all over again?
- What are the biggest advantages of being employed?
- What are the biggest advantages of being self-employed?
- What are the greatest drawbacks to being employed? Do you think you'll be free from those in this opportunity?
- What are the greatest challenges in building a business like this one?

You get the idea. Ask open-ended questions, which naturally lead to further questions. Try to determine whether they are running from something or going to something. In other words are they just fed up with their current or recent employment experience, or have they been planning to find a good business opportunity for some time? Are they becoming their own boss to show their former boss they don't need him, or are they really committed to being an entrepreneur? Do their answers reflect feelings of being limited in a job environment? Do their answers reflect good insight into themselves? Do they display anger and frustration from their past/present situation, and do those feelings represent a temporary condition until a new job comes along or are they really entrepreneur material?

As you become proficient at questioning, you'll be able to reveal a candidate's motivation for considering this career. You'll make better recruiting decisions and as a consequence have more time to devote to the candidates that will succeed. Having more agents who are likely to succeed will lead to better time management and faster growth.

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