

Stop Interviewing Potential Agents!

There's no question that an important key to business success is building a productive team of agents or advisors. This, in fact, is a three-step process. The first step is to find good candidates to begin with, the second step is to properly select the candidates who are most likely to succeed, and the third step is to effectively train these new agents and get them into a business-owner's mindset. One area in which many managers often miss the mark is in the selection process.

Effective recruiting is an ongoing effort. If you've been following me and my philosophies on recruiting, you already know that I'm a big advocate of "Active" recruiting and a basher of "Passive" recruiting. In discussing these methods with managers around the country, there is universal agreement that candidates found through Active methods have far better potential than those found through Passive methods. They generally tend to be better-suited to the life of an independent agent/advisor, they learn faster, produce more, are more responsive and are more loyal. Regardless of how a candidate comes to us however, we need to decide whether this person is a good fit for this business, as well as a fit for us and our operation. This effort turns out to be harder than it seems.

Think about it. How often have we selected someone who we "knew" would become a superstar, only to have them end up in mediocrity or worse - drop out of the program? Or conversely, how often have you decided to bring someone on board "against your better judgment", only to find them out-pacing the rest of your team? The truth is that identifying a candidate that has the "ability" to succeed besides having the "potential" to succeed is a bit of a challenge. And I believe that most managers go about this selection process wrong. Most managers "interview" their candidates and that just doesn't work.

When a manager "interviews" a candidate, they typically conduct a variation of a "JOB INTERVIEW"! When someone interviews a potential agent or advisor, they review their resume as if they were considering them for a job and they ask the typical job-oriented questions. The problem with this approach is fairly obvious. We're not looking for employees; we're looking for potential business owners! When we select a potential agent as if we were selecting a new employee, guess what we end up with? A new employee! The key then is to stop interviewing potential agents and to start evaluating potential business owners.

Think about how you review a person's resume. Most people look over a candidate's resume with the eye of an employer. They look for job stability, positions held, and accomplishments. While these considerations do provide valid information, they miss the point of reviewing the resume. For example, one might feel that job stability is a reflection of the candidate's loyalty and persistence. You might conclude that if a person has a stable job history they themselves will be stable. And those conclusions may be true. However, I could easily make the argument that if a person has regularly changed jobs, it demonstrates that he or she has been dissatisfied in the job world and would flourish in the world of the entrepreneur. Or conversely, if a person shows strong stability in his or her work history, it could suggest that they make a better employee than they do a business owner. How do you decide which is the reality for this person? How can you determine whether job stability is a good thing or a bad thing with respect to this candidate? That is an art in and of itself. It requires mastery of the art of asking questions as well as mastering the art of listening. A good portion of these arts lies in understanding the motivations behind an individual's actions and decisions.

Let's examine the pitfalls of the typical interview question process. Think of the questions a person asks during a job interview. They might ask about why they left a particular job. They might ask about what goals a person has. They might ask the candidate to describe their present job. Maybe an interviewer will even ask what they liked best about each of their positions. They might ask why the candidate is considering this new position or opportunity.

These are all good questions, but not very useful for our purposes. Think about it. When someone goes for a job interview, they are (or should be) prepared to effectively answer those questions. Everyone knows the kinds of questions they'll be asked in a job interview and they prepare answers for them. People can pretty well guess what kind of answer you're looking for in an interview. The key then, is to approach question-asking from a different perspective; a perspective which helps you uncover a person's motivations and their true nature. One of the challenges to uncovering who a person really is, is that often they don't really know who they are themselves. To reveal a person often requires reading between the lines and seeing what isn't there. Again, there is an art to this process.

Although we aren't able to delve into the details of what to look for when evaluating a candidate within the scope of this article, suffice it to say that it begins with an understanding of exactly what traits and competencies a successful agent/advisor should possess. Once we have a clear picture of what those traits and competencies are, we need to understand how to determine whether a candidate has them. Some of them can be determined from properly reviewing a resume. Some of them can only be determined from interacting with them. But there are a number of traits and competencies which can't be determined from a resume nor by spending time with them. Certain traits can only be demonstrated.

The bottom line is that if you are in the mode of "interviewing" candidate agents or advisors, then you're missing the boat in the selection process. You won't have determined whether they have the traits and competencies necessary for success in our business, and you'll unintentionally have recruited an employee.

Stop interviewing candidates and start evaluating business owners.

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