



Hiring For Attitude

By Mark Murphy, CEO of Leadership IQ

If your organisation is going to excel, it needs the right people. However, virtually every one of the standard approaches to selecting the right people is dead wrong, and here is why: whenever managers talk about hiring the right people, they usually mean “highly skilled people.” For lots of executives, the war for talent is a war for the most technically competent people. But that’s the wrong war to be fighting. Most new hires do not fail on the job due to a lack of skill.

Leadership IQ, tracked 20,000 new hires over a three year period. Within the first 18 months, 46% of them failed (got fired, received poor performance reviews, or were written up). And as bad as that sounds, it’s pretty consistent with other studies over the years and thus not too shocking. What is shocking, though, is why those people failed.

We categorised and distilled the top 5 reasons why new hires failed and found these results:

1. **Coachability** (26%): The ability to accept and implement feedback from bosses, colleagues, customers and others.
2. **Emotional Intelligence** (23%): The ability to understand and manage one’s own emotions and accurately assess others’ emotions.
3. **Motivation** (17%): Sufficient drive to achieve one’s full potential and excel in the job.
4. **Temperament** (15%): Attitude and personality suited to the particular job and work environment.
5. **Technical Competence** (11%): Functional or technical skills required to do the job.

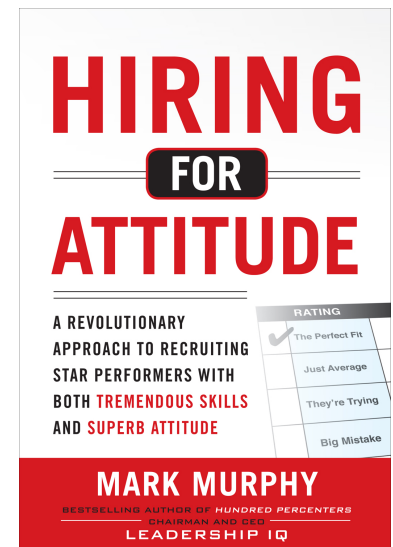
You’ll notice that a lack of skills or competence only accounted for 11% of new-hire failures. When a new hire was wrong for the company it was due to attitude, not a lack of skills.

Attitude Is A Bigger Issue Than Skills

Our study showed that somebody was a bad hire for attitudinal reasons 89% of the time. In some cases, those new hires just were not coachable, or they did not have sufficient emotional intelligence or motivation, or they just didn’t sync with the organisation.

But whatever the particulars, the wrong attitude is what defined the wrong person in the overwhelming majority of cases.

Exercise: Make a quick list of the characteristics that define low performers who work for you. These are the kind of people that you regret hiring or keeping, the ones who cost you time, energy and emotional pain.





Top Characteristics Of Low Performers

- Are negative
- Blame others
- Feel entitled
- Don't take initiative
- Procrastinate
- Resist change
- Create drama for attention

Overwhelmingly, the characteristics that define mis-hires (low performers) are attitudinal. Certainly, skills matter but the best skills do not really matter if an employee isn't open to improving or consistently alienates coworkers, lacks drive, or simply lacks the right personality to succeed in that culture.

So of the 20,000 new hires tracked over a three year period:

- 46% of new hires failed in one way or another,
- 35% became middle performers, and only
- 19% went on to become legitimate high performers.

Rounding out the numbers a bit, for every 10 people I hire, about 5 will fail, 3 will do okay and 2 will be great.

The People You Shouldn't Hire

1. People whose attitudes just don't fit your culture.
2. People who have problem attitudes.

Think of performance as having two dimensions: skill and attitude. You can undoubtedly come up with others, but our numerous studies show that almost all attributes of low performance ultimately get subsumed by skills or attitude.

The general rule of thumb is that people who are incompetent and unpleasant can usually be classified as low performers. (They have lousy skills and bad attitudes.)

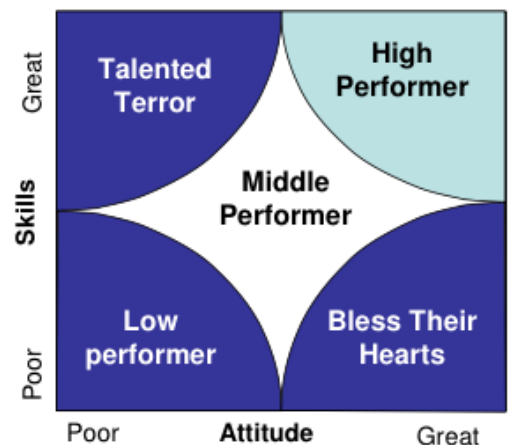
BLESS THEIR HEARTS

We call people with great attitudes but lousy skills the "Bless Their Hearts." They try hard and genuinely want to please and do a good job but who repeatedly fails to get the job done right. That person is a 'low performer' and no amazing amount of attitude is going to make up for it.

TALENTED TERRORS

Exact opposite of "Bless Their Hearts." They have great skills but lousy attitudes. They are emotional vampires and are also the most difficult kind of low performer to detect in an interview. They can be masters at turning on and off some of their more troubling attitudinal problems. If they had zero redeeming qualities than they would be quite easy to detect and dismiss as candidates. In the real world, things are seldom black and white, and Talented Terrors are no different.

Performance Breakdown





Discovering Differential Characteristics

The key is to think about Differential Characteristics - the attitudes that separate your high performers from your middle performers and your low performers from everybody else. You need to know which characteristics predict failure in your organisation so you can avoid hiring people with those traits, and which ones predict success, so you can recruit and hire more folks who have those characteristics. We call it *behavioural specificity*.

3-3-3 EXERCISE

Write down the attitudinal characteristics of your 3 best and 3 worst employees over the past 3 years.

Here is an example of one client's conclusions after they conducted this discovery exercise.

The three best employees:

1. Can distinguish between really big problems that could permanently damage the company and minor problems that temporarily irritate employees (but don't hurt the company or the customers).
2. Help ownership make smarter strategic decisions by proactively providing important information (including bad news) in a candid and open-minded way, without tunnel vision.
3. Take responsibility for, and actually accomplish, constantly growing their own skills set.

The three worst employees:

1. Blame others (including departments or even customers) or make excuses when things go wrong.
2. Are not collaborative, preferring to fly solo and then get all the glory, even if it means ultimately generating a suboptimal solution.
3. Are overwhelmed by multiple demands and become paralysed, unable to accomplish anything, instead of effectively triaging and accomplishing all of their required work.

Two good interview questions to help determine the above characteristics are:

- "Please describe a situation when you were asked to do something work-related that you didn't know how to do."
- "Please describe a recent mistake that you've seen other employees make in their dealings with internal or external customers."



CASE STUDY

Microchip Technology CEO, Steve Sanghi, wrote a book called *Driving Excellence: How the Aggregate System Turned Microchip Technology from a Failing Company to a Market Leader*. Essentially, they took everything that could influence an employee's performance and got it fully aligned. They clarified and shared its values, got managers to model those values, and refused to tolerate any politics, ego, or arrogance. It hires for attitude. It still finds people who fit its highly collaborative and ego-free, yet still hyper-technical culture. They discovered that the most successful engineers had tremendously high empathy for both customers and colleagues.

A poor fit in the Microchip culture would deal with frustrated (and frustrating) customers by:

- **Condescending:** "I'm the expert in our products, you're not, so..."
- **Placating:** "Here, have some free software and stop complaining..."
- **Overwhelming:** "You want technical specifications? Well, open the warehouse, because I've got a truckload of technical specifications..."
- **Challenging:** "That last request you made is technically unfeasible-tell me how you even arrived at those calculations."
- **Ignoring:** "That customer has a crazy request every time he's anxious, but ignore it for a day and he'll settle down and forget it."

In contrast, potential high performers not only avoided all those bad behaviours, but also exhibited:

- **Understanding:** "A customer got really angry and swore at me up and down." and "However, I knew she was just stressed and reacting in the moment, and I was sympathetic to her plight of being caught between multiple bosses' requests."
- **Caring:** "Even our best friends sometimes get quarrelsome and difficult, but we don't abandon them or refuse to help." and "In fact, when a friend is in trouble, it usually makes us want to get in there and help even more."
- **Persistence:** "I ended up staying on the phone with her until almost midnight, but we finally got things figured out and working right."
- **Objectivity:** "When I felt myself getting defensive, I took a mental step back to get an objective view on how the customer viewed the situation." and "I suggested the wrong product to a customer so he abruptly decided to stop doing business with us. I called a meeting with their management and apologised with no excuses. They're now back with us."



The Interview Questions You Should NOT Be Asking

DON'T ASK THE THREE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

Many interview questions are utterly useless because they elicit rehearsed responses.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths?
3. What are your weaknesses?

These questions are too vague; they only allow for unintelligent answers. They are too well known and it's remarkably easy to conceive and verbalise any number of empty answers. Virtually every candidate has a ready, canned answer. Because all of those rehearsed answers sound the same, it is nearly impossible to differentiate between future high and low performers based on any answer.

Rapport building is all about getting people relaxed and making them feel comfortable enough to open up to you, not making them recite an uninspiring answer to a question that is trying to judge them.



DON'T ASK THE BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a difficult situation. What did you do?
2. Tell me about a time when you had to balance competing priorities and did so successfully.
3. Tell me about a conflict with a coworker and how you resolved it.

Behavioural questions are only effective when they prompt a response that reveals the truth about both weaknesses and strengths. This is where these 3 questions go horribly wrong. Every one of them contains an obvious tip-off on how to deliver a response that showcases the good and hides the bad. They are all leading questions – they lead the candidate to give the desired answer.

Despite the variety of personalities and attitudes out there, you can roughly categorise people into two groups: the problem bringers and the problem solvers. If you ask, "Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a difficult situation." It may sound like a good question but the word *adapt* turns it into a leading question, sending a clear message that you want to hear only about a time the candidate adapted (Instead of the many times that the person failed to adapt).

Now, in the case of true high performer candidates (the problem solvers) this isn't a big deal. They have plenty of examples that describe a time when they successfully adapted to a difficult situation.

For problem bringers (low performers), using the word *adapt* makes it virtually useless. Take out the word *adapt* and they can ramble on and on just basically complaining without hinting that they tried to solve it.

For Question 2, take out "did so successfully" and it is no longer a "leading" question.



For Question 3, take out “and how you resolved it” and it is no longer a leading question.

The whole point of an interview question is to reveal the candidate’s true attitude, not his or her canned, rehearsed interview personality.

DON'T ASK THE HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

Most hypothetical questions begin by asking “What would you do if...” followed by some kind of situation such as “you had to make a big decision?” The answers they inspire are usually idealised. You will get a lot of responses that sound like something a high performer would do, but those answers will rarely reflect reality. The bottom line is that that it’s impossible to try and predict what people will do in reality by asking them about a hypothetical situation.

Another problem with most hypothetical questions is that it is not difficult to discern what the interviewer wants in response, and thus it’s easy to come up with the correct answer.

DON'T ASK UN-DIFFERENTIATING QUESTIONS

An interview question is worth asking only if it differentiates between high and low performers. Bad interview questions can be crazy, funny, and even entertaining, but they all share a common link: they do not do anything to help you assess attitude.

How To Create Interview Questions

You should have a list of the critical high and low performer attitudes that predict success and failure in your organisation. How to create those differentiating questions.

STEP 1 – PICK ONE OF YOUR HIGH PERFORMER CHARACTERISTICS

STEP 2 – IDENTIFY A DIFFERENTIAL SITUATION TO ELICIT THOSE HIGH PERFORMER CHARACTERISTICS

High performers and low performers respond very differently when faced with similar situations.

- When faced with an opportunity for recognition, the high performers demure while the low performers step on anyone in order to get that notice or reward.
- When things go wrong, high performers aren’t interested in finding a source of blame; they stay focused on finding a solution.
- Low performers, in contrast, are quick to blame others and eager to escape accountability.
- When high performers are asked to do something they don’t know how to do, they actively acquire new knowledge or skills.
- Low performers, on the other hand, immediately throw up their hands, resist and complain.



We call these, “differential situations.” because they are moments when the differences between high and low performers are most starkly in contrast.

The ultimate test of a great interview question is the extent to which it differentiates between high and low performers.

- High performers are self-directed learners, and if they don't know how to do something, they actively find the information or other resources they need.
- Low performers have a negative disposition, and when faced with a new situation, they regularly respond with reasons why something will not work rather than try to figure out ways to achieve success.

When you create these questions, pick situations that the employee will face most frequently; e.g. we are partial to situations where people have faced failure.

STEP 3 – BEGIN THE QUESTION BY ASKING: “COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU..... AND THEN INSERT THE SITUATION YOU JUST IDENTIFIED

For example, “Could you tell me about a time when you tried to fix or improve something but your solution just did not work?”

STEP 4 – LEAVE THE QUESTION HANGING

One of the worst things you can do with a behavioural interview question is to finish off the sentence with a leading phrase such as, “...and how did you overcome that?”

Could you tell me about a time you faced competing priorities...”
People instinctively want to add, “and how did you balance them.”

Resist the urge to add phrases like this because they become leading questions and destroy their effectiveness.

“COULD YOU...”

The words we choose to begin the question with are important. “Could you tell me...” controls the question better and it lets the candidate feel like they have some measure of control in the interview process.

People are generally guarded when they are in an interview. They may seem perfectly open, jovial, and relaxed. That just means they are good performers.

Give candidates the feeling that they have more control in the process so it feels less like an exam and more like a conversation, and you will be surprised at the information you will uncover.

When people are hammered with questions, especially questions that start to sound like orders – “Tell me about...” - it constantly reminds them that they are in a powerless position, and that everything they say is being critically judged. As a result, they become guarded and reticent in what they are willing to share.



In order to get people to open up in their responses, you want them to forget they're in a position without much power. Instead, you want them to feel that this is more like a conversation with a new friend. And when you are talking about interpersonal communication, perception truly is reality.

What about Problem Solvers and Problem Bringers?

The following question was constructed specifically to allow for multiple interpretations. "Could you tell me about a time you tried to fix something and it didn't work."

Problem-solver personalities simply cannot bring themselves to think about a situation as a total failure. They need to keep trying and eventually solve it or at least salvage some useful lesson. And you will generally hear that underlying interpretation in the responses problem solvers provide, just as you will hear the opposite in the answers from the problem bringers. High performers also take personal responsibility for the quality and timeliness of their work without blame or excuses. By contrast, low performers usually blame others, including customers.



High performers consistently maintain a positive and cheerful frame of mind even in the face of failure and other difficult situations. In contrast, low performers maintain a negative disposition, and when faced with tough situations, they find reasons why something will not work rather than try to figure out ways to make it succeed.

Here are some more questions to help assess "attitude."

"Could you tell me about a time when

- your boss gave you an assignment that didn't seem to make much sense?"*
- you were given an assignment that you were sure wasn't going to succeed?"*
- you were struggling to meet a commitment you had made to a customer, boss or colleague?"*
- you were given an assignment that really didn't fall within your role?"*
- working across departmental, divisional or regional lines was challenging?"*
- you had to think outside the box?"*



The Coachability Question

There is one universal question that can be used anywhere, in any work environment. The study of failures in hiring revealed that the single biggest reason that new hires fail is lack of coachability. The “Coachability Question” has five parts and each part must be asked in order and exactly as described next.

1. What was your boss’s name? Please spell the full name for me.
2. Tell me about (.....boss’s name.....) as a boss.
3. What’s something that you could have done (or done differently) to enhance your working relationship with (.....boss’s name.....)?
4. When I talk to (.....boss’s name.....), what will he or she tell me are your strengths?
5. Now all people have areas where they can improve, so when I talk to (.....boss’s name.....), what will he or she tell me are your weaknesses?

Coachability Questions

STEP 1: MAKE THEM BELIEVE YOU’RE GOING TO TALK WITH THEIR PREVIOUS BOSS

Once you have the name, you absolutely must get the proper spelling of the full name. The logic here is that nobody would waste time confirming the spelling of a name in such a detailed manner if they weren’t actually planning to contact that person or at least that’s what you want the candidate to think. Having the candidate believe you are actually going to call their boss for a reference is great motivation to give truthful responses. This little psychological twist makes this whole process so much more revealing.



STEP 2: ASK THEM TO DESCRIBE THEIR BOSS

Ask “So tell me about what (...boss’s name...) was like as a boss?”

The response will give you some hints about what the person is looking for in a boss depending upon how they answer the question. Now, regardless of whether the response is positive or negative, many people have received training that teaches them never to talk about their last boss. That is why you might need the following two probing questions about their former boss.

- What’s something you wish (...boss’s name...) had done more of?
- What’s something you wish (...boss’s name...) had done less of?

These two questions are simple but powerful. So ask these two probes, one after another, and you’ll hear specific information about what this person needs from a manager in order to be a successful employee. That answer is an absolute goldmine of information about whether you’ll actually be able to manage that person effectively.



STEP 3: ASK WHAT THEY PERSONALLY COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY

We also want to assess to what extent the candidate feels personally accountable for their own success. And this entails asking, “What’s something you could have done (or done differently) to enhance your working relationship with (.....boss’s name.....)?”

High performers have high levels of critical self-awareness, which includes the ability to look critically at their own performance and see as many, if not more, flaws than anyone else. This is part of the very definition of coachability. If someone cannot fathom what could have been done differently to make things better (even if things were already fantastic), then you know this person has no upside for additional improvement.

It’s a natural law of the universe that everyone has the potential for more improvement, no matter how good a person already is. The real question is whether someone is personally aware that this room for improvement exists and are they genuinely interested in personal and professional development.

Another thing you want to learn is whether or not the candidate takes any ownership for creating and maintaining a healthy relationship with the boss. The best candidates will not only tell you about the ownership they’ve taken but will also tell you about what personal changes they made since working with that boss. High performers don’t just talk about what they could do to improve; they actually go and do it.

STEP 4: ASK THEM WHAT THEIR BOSS CONSIDERED THEIR STRENGTHS

This is easily done by asking “When I talk to (.....boss’s name.....), what will they tell me about your biggest strengths?”

First, before you start asking about someone’s weaknesses, it’s nice to start with a more pleasant question. Talking about strengths makes people feel less guarded, and it will help keep your candidates feeling comfortable and more open in their communications with you.

Second, it gives you an honest look at the qualities your candidate likes best about themselves.

For instance, if someone talks about being process-oriented and very detailed in his work, and you are looking for an out of the box, big picture thinker, you just learned something very valuable.

If you just simply ask people to describe their strengths, you’re going to get a canned answer that reflects what the person believes you want to hear, not what the person actually believes.

But when you ask it this way, under the veil of honesty brought about by the belief you’re going to verify this with their last boss, you will hear a very different answer.



STEP 5: ASK THEM WHAT THEIR BOSS CONSIDERED THEIR WEAKNESSES

Again, this can be accomplished with a simple question such as, “Now everyone has some weaknesses, so when I talk to, (.....boss’s name.....), what will they tell me are yours?”

This is perhaps the most critical of the five-step process, but it only works if you have completed the first four previous steps. In fact, if you do the first four steps successfully (especially confirming the spelling of the boss’s name in Step 1), you might be shocked at the level of honesty this question elicits. You want to listen to the response you get to this question on two levels.

First, you’re going to assess whether the weakness is something you can live with. For instance, if someone says she was criticised for lying, being too political, or not completing assignments on time, then you may have revealed that this person shares some characteristics with your low performers. Remember, the focus of the Coachability Question is to determine if someone is coachable or not.

Second, if the response you get is “I can’t think of any weaknesses,” or something like “I honestly don’t know what (.....boss’s name.....) thought about me,” then you’ve hit the biggest warning sign that someone is not coachable. If that person didn’t (or couldn’t) hear the constructive feedback offered by a previous boss, what are the chances you will be successful giving that person feedback.

People who can’t hear or assimilate constructive criticism are not coachable. And even without formal conversations with the boss, if they can’t put themselves in their boss’s shoes and anticipate their assessment, they’re not coachable. It is a common misconception that coachability is only about the ability to hear and assimilate feedback. Coachability also involves the ability to anticipate feedback because it indicates your self-awareness and willingness to critique yourself.



Textual Analysis

Leadership IQ has been engaged in some cutting-edge textual analysis research to assess the differences between high performers and low performers. That is, we know things like whether high performers primarily use the past or future tense in their answers. What kinds of pronouns and adverbs low performers choose, and so much more. This is the “rocket science” of our industry. So let me share some of our stunning findings.

We analysed the language style and grammar across tens of thousands of responses and compared them with how high and low performer answers varied. Our textual analysis focused on five categories: (1) pronouns (2) tense (3) voice (4) emotions and (5) qualifiers. Here are the results.

1. PRONOUNS

First person pronouns: The high performer answers (Positive Signal Category) contain roughly 60% more first person pronouns (I, me, we) than answers given by low performers (Warning Signs Category)

Second person pronouns: Low performer answers contain 400% more second person pronouns (you, your) than high performer answers.

Third person pronouns: Low performer answers use about 90% more third person pronouns (he, she, they) than high performer answers.

Neuter pronouns: Low performers answers use 70% more neuter pronouns (it, itself) than high performer answers.

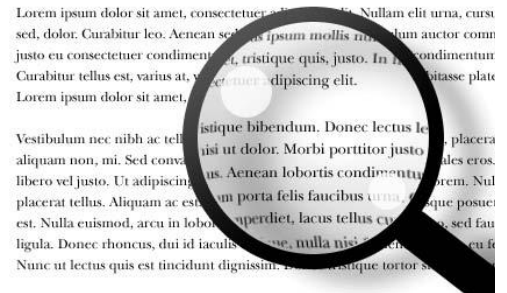
So what does all this mean? Simply put, high performers talk about themselves and what they did. In contrast, typical low performer answers contained a lot more second and third person language.

High performers might say something like “I called the customers on Tuesday and I asked them to share their concerns. A low performer might say “Customers need to be contacted so they can express themselves...” or “You should always call customers and ask them to share their concerns.”

High performers talk about themselves and how they’ve used their great attitudes because they have lots of experience to draw from. They didn’t shy away from first person pronouns. But low performers don’t have those great attitudinal experiences and are thus more likely to give abstract answers that merely describe how “you” should handle it. This is really nothing more than a hypothetical response; it doesn’t show what that person actually did in that situation.

Additionally, research has found that when people lie, they often use more second and third person pronouns because they’re subconsciously disassociating themselves from the lie.

The lesson here is to listen carefully to whether people are talking about I / me – which is good- or talking about you / he / she / it – which is not so good.





2. VERB TENSE

Past tense: Answers from high performers use 40% more past tense answers than low performers.

Present tense: Answers from low performers use 120% more present tense than answers from high performers.

Future tense: Answers from low performers use 70% more future tense than answers from high performers.

In a nutshell, when you ask high performers to tell you about a past experience, they will actually tell you about that past experience. Quite logically, they will use past tense. By contrast, low performers will answer your request to describe a past experience with lots of wonderfully spun tales about what they are (present tense) doing, or what they will (future tense) do. Unlike high performers, they can't tell you about all those past experiences because they don't have them.

So, for instance, when asked to describe a difficult customer situation, high performers will respond with an example stated in the past tense. "I had a customer who was having issues with her server and was about to miss her deadline."

In contrast, low performers are more likely to express their response in the present or future tense. "When a customer is upset, the number one rule is to never admit you don't know the right answer, or "I would calm an irrational person down by making it clear I know more than she does."

You'll also notice that those present and future tenses are usually accomplished by second and third pronouns (you, he, she, they), whereas the past tense is linked to the first person pronoun (I, me, we).

3. VOICE

Answers in the Warning Signs category use 40 to 50% more passive voice than the answers in the Positive Signal category. Here is a brief description of 'active' and 'passive' voice:

Active Voice:

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence is doing the action, for example, "John likes the CEO." John is the subject, and he is doing the action – he likes the boss, the object of the sentence.

Another example is "I heard it though the grapevine." In this case, "I" is the subject, the one who is doing the action. "I" is hearing it, which is the object of the sentence.

Passive Voice:

In the passive voice, the target of the action gets promoted to the subject position. Instead of saying "John likes the CEO, the passive voice says "The CEO is liked by John." The subject of the sentence becomes the CEO, but she isn't doing anything. Rather, she is just the recipient of John's liking. The focus of the sentence has changed from John to the CEO.



For the other example, we'd say "It was heard by me through the grapevine." Notice how much more stilted the passive voice sounds? It is awkward and appears affected, meaning it's often used by people trying to sound smarter than they actually are. To be sure, there are academic types who rely more on the passive voice, and academia has higher concentrations of this rhetoric style. But more often than not, intelligent people will speak directly with the active voice.

4. EMOTIONS

Positive emotions: High performers' answers contain about 25% more positive emotions (happy, thrilled, excited) than low performer answers.

Negative emotions: Low performer answers contain about 90% more negative emotions (angry, afraid, jilted, pessimistic) than high performer answers.

However, the real difference with emotion is how infrequently high performers express negative emotions compared to low performers.



5. QUALIFIERS

Qualifiers is a broad category that covers anything that modifies, limits, hedges or restricts the meaning of the answer. This list includes adverbs, negation, waffling and absolutes.

Adverbs

Answers in the low performer category contain 40% more adverbs (think of words ending in '-ly' like quickly, totally, thoroughly) than high performer answers.

- High performers are more likely to give answers without qualifiers. Their answers are direct, factual, in the past tense, and personal.
- Low performers, on the other hand, are more likely to qualify their answers. For instance, they might use adverbs to amp up their answers because the facts probably don't speak well enough on their own. So instead of listing a situation where they had a brilliant idea, they might say, "I was constantly / always / often / usually (all adverbs) coming up with great ideas."

Negation

- Low performers' answers use 130% more negation (no, neither) than high performer answers. It's not uncommon to hear low performers say things like "I had no idea what to do" or "Nobody in my department really knew what he/she was doing."

Waffling

- Low performers use 40% more waffling (could be, maybe, perhaps) than high performers.

Absolutes

- Low performers use 100% more absolutes (always, never) than high performers.



It may seem strange that waffling and absolutes would go hand in hand, but they do. Both tend to stem from insecurity.

Use of absolutes stems from both insecurity and a need to show off, for example: “The people in my department never know what they’re doing and always ask for my help. It also shows a tendency towards black and white thinking and a lack of intellectual flexibility, which are hardly great qualities.

Textual analysis is a revolutionary idea and we are just scratching the surface of its many applications.

Be Sure To Listen

You need to listen. I mean really listen – no talking, no interjecting. Whenever you get the urge to interject, bite your tongue and slowly count to three – one ‘one thousand’, two ‘one thousand’, three ‘one thousand’ – keeping your mouth shut. The ensuing stretch of silence tends to make people uncomfortable, especially when they are being interviewed.

They start thinking it’s their fault that no one is talking and say things to fill the void instead of looking bad. In fact, when faced with uncomfortable silence, people will start talking 95% of the time. You risk feeling a millisecond of discomfort but it’s worth it if it elicits the facts you are looking for.

The natural impulse is to jump in there and help the candidate with a follow up question like, “What was the outcome?” or “How did you deal with it?” But the key word here is help, and you must remember that we aren’t here to help the candidates turn themselves into problem solvers when they weren’t. Rather, we are here to find out if they were already problem solvers or not.



High Performer v Low Performer Characteristics

HIGH PERFORMERS

- Are highly collaborative.
- Help each other out without being asked, and without any expectation of recognition or reward.
- Share constructive thoughts and reactions without making their colleagues defensive, angry or embarrassed.
- Take personal responsibility for the quality and timeliness of their work without blame or excuses.
- Have problemsthey solve them and then they share the problems and solutions with others so that everyone else can learn from their issues.
- Are self directed learners so if they don’t know how to do something, they actively find the necessary information or other resources to help them gain the skills and knowledge they need.



LOW PERFORMERS

- Routinely want individual recognition rather than share recognition with the larger team.
- Share constructive ideas in ways that belittle, embarrass or anger their colleagues.
- Blame others – colleagues, customers, anybody – when things go wrong, and say things like, “I couldn’t get it done...It’s not my fault.... or It’s somebody else’s fault.”
- Have a negative disposition. When faced with a new situation, they regularly respond with the reasons why something will not work rather than trying to figure out ways to get the job done and achieve success.

Shoves and Tugs (Demotivators and Motivators)

Shoves are those issues that de-motivate you, drain your energy, stop you from giving 100%, and make you want to quit (they shove you out the door). Tugs are those issues that motivate and fulfil you, make you want to give 100%, and keep you coming back every day (they tug at you to stay).

This leads to two big questions:

- How do you discover the Shoves and Tugs of the people you would like to recruit?
- Can you really work this information into a recruiting pitch like a job ad?

The first question is easily answered. If you want to know people’s Shoves and Tugs, you just need to ask them. And the following two questions are typically all it takes.

1. Can you describe a time in the past few months when you felt de-motivated (or frustrated or emotionally burnt out or whatever words sound like something you would say)?
2. Can you describe a time in the past few months when you felt motivated (or excited or jazzed up, or however you might naturally express this)?



Summary — high-performing employees will:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the highest levels of professionalism. • Treat both internal and external customers as a priority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regard a sense of responsibility as crucial to performance. • Demonstrate positive attitude and behaviour. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead by example. • Engage in open, honest and direct conversation. • Respect and trust the talents and intentions of their fellow employees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge the status quo when appropriate. • Be reliable, dependable and meet their commitments. |
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