

FAST COMPANY

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[5 THINGS] Test of Character

IT'S STRAIGHTFORWARD enough to hire for capability. We can judge experience and credentials. We can test skills. But what about character? Most companies want leaders who, given the choice between right and wrong, naturally do right. They need leaders whom employees and customers can trust. Yet hiring procedures rarely attempt to gauge that side of a candidate.

Chuck Pappalardo, managing director of Trilogy Venture Search, a recruiting firm in Burlingame, California, is working on that. With the help of an ethicist, he has developed a method to guide the search for character.

—Keith H. Hammonds

- [1] Conduct an internal audit to assess your company's values. Does its culture support action? Does it allow and encourage people to do the right thing? Is character discussed among top policy makers? The point here is to determine how a person of character would fit in.

- [2] Profile the behaviors that your organization associates with character. These fall under three categories: integrity, inspiring others, and humility. For integrity, a behavior might be "creates and sustains trust." Then develop interview questions that explore these behaviors.

- [3] To evaluate integrity, probe how a candidate confronts problems. A Pappalardo question: "Tell me about a time you faced a grave financial dilemma, or a difficult personnel situation." The questions should be open-ended, forcing the candidate to say more than a sentence.

- [4] To judge a person's ability to inspire, find out how she deals with bad news and whether she is a consensus builder. One good question is "Tell me about the time you crafted a process or methodology to get a new result." Or ask about the last team she built. What worked—and what was least successful?

- [5] Gauge the individual's humility, or lack thereof. Listen for unsubstantiated claims of accomplishment. Test the person's self-awareness. Ask "What's the biggest misperception of you?" Says Pappalardo: "That's one of my favorites, because there are no misperceptions."

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