

# 7 C's of Hiring for Excellence

by Gerry Monasterial



I recently heard a colleague say that “When you hire the right person, 90% of your work is behind you, and when you hire the wrong person, 90% of your work is ahead of you.” If this is even half true, then the task of hiring is one of the most crucial tasks of any leader/manager. I’m actually writing this article in the midst of my own hiring process for a recently vacated sales territory. Although I am certain through my own studies and experiences that what I’m proposing in the following pages will be useful for others, I also concede that this is not an end-all recipe for the perfect hire. In fact, my own theories below will likely be challenged as it always is during the real-life process of trying to find the “right” person. To be clear, the purpose of this article is not to exhaust every possible detail when selecting candidates or preparing to be the best candidate, it is simply to give you what I believe are the 7 most essential components to start with.

## ***RESPONSIBLE TRANSPARENCY IS ALWAYS THE BEST ROUTE IN THE HIRING PROCESS***

The treasure is found in the purposeful awareness of each component, the specific quotes that shed light on their deeper meaning, and some of the questions and/or techniques to evaluate the 7 components. I also provide a few additional resources for a deeper dive by authors that can do better justice in the meanings & consequences of several of these important components. Whether you are the interviewer or the interviewee, I hope you will find the following information useful as you search for or become the best possible candidate for the “right” role. Speaking of the “right” role, I’m a big believer that responsible transparency is always the best route in the hiring process. Responsible transparency is being authentic without being compromised. Authenticity is crucial in the beginning of every relationship, however trust should be earned



over time. Furthermore, there's definitely a difference between advertising the best version of yourself through knowledge and practice versus faking something that's not real at all. The latter will ultimately result in misery and/or failure for both parties. In addition, I need to point out that I book-ended the 7 essential Cs with the two components that are non-negotiable, Character and Capacity. I will explain why in those specific sessions. Finally, these components are usually important in any role but the importance of each one (except for Character and Capacity) will differ on whether the role is in leadership, sales, marketing, or something more technical and less communicative. It's up to you as the interviewer or interviewee to find and place the value where it's needed. As an interviewer, if you have the luxury of conducting multiple rounds, consider focusing on the intangibles (such as character, characteristics, and capacity) in the initial rounds, then narrowing the conversation down to the specific competencies in the later rounds. In the hiring process, there is an equal need for Intellectual and Emotional Intelligence to ascertain the full context of a person when striving for the "right person in the right role" that adds value to the employer as well as the employee's own sense of fulfillment and happiness.

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I know what you're thinking, how do you discern someone's true character with a simple interview? Even checking references only reveals a person's reputation (which is not always reflective of character). Not to mention it's only their reputation among references of their own choosing, in most cases. In addition, it's easy to mistake characteristics for true character traits too often. For example, can someone be loud & annoying and still be of good character? Can someone be attentive and a good listener but actually be of questionable character? There are no absolute right or wrong answers to these questions. These are important questions that require leaders to consider the full context while still taking a responsible risk every time they add someone to their team. Although first impressions are usually the strongest, they shouldn't always be trusted. Zig Ziglar once wrote, "Circumstances don't create character, they reveal character". Although I am a HUGE fan of Zig Ziglar's work, I somewhat disagree with this notion. I believe circumstances can absolutely shape & create our character over time, otherwise, hardships or mentorships are useless and growth is impossible. With that said, whether character is simply revealed or is creatable over time isn't the point. The point is that as leaders, we must navigate thoughtfully through the evidence to improve our chances of hiring who we think we're hiring. I have certainly hired people that were different 6 months later than the person I thought I hired, some for the better and some not. I've also chosen companies to work for

based more on the first impression, perhaps the hiring manager, without digging deep enough into the context of character in the company. In the end, the component of character will drive the other components and must be considered as the foundation to any hiring decision.

## QUOTES

"Goodness is about character: integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like. More than anything else, it is about how we treat other people." – Dennis Prager

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"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." – John Wooden

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"Character is like a tree & reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing." – Abraham Lincoln

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## Additional Learnings:

LinkedIn article by Julia Fawal: "5 Interview Questions that will help you hire better people"

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman (a great study on the importance of full context including the upside vs downside of first impressions)

\*Most books on character are actually speaking to the broader topic of "characteristics", which definitely add to the fabric of our character but don't truly define it.

## Interview questions/tips:

1. What does success mean for you?
2. What is your life vision/mission statement? If you don't have one, walk me through what it could be if you did.
3. Give me examples of how you have had to place someone else's best interest ahead of your own.
4. Closely reviewing a resume for gaps in timelines or concerns in details can reveal the honesty of the candidate. Are they forthright about these gaps & concerns? Are they willing to be vulnerable to handle these questions with integrity?

**CHARACTERISTICS** – relating to traits aside from Integrity, includes personality & tendencies

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Characteristics are identifiable features or qualities that each person presents, either intrinsically or explicitly. In other words, characteristics can be seen, heard, or experienced as an adjective or an action. The challenge is to create an environment and have conversations that clearly identify authentic characteristics to ensure the right fit for a role, including any team dynamics. For hiring salespeople, the interview process itself can be a very close replica to the actual role. Characteristics such as tenacity, taking initiative, strong follow-up, listening well, being articulate, etc., can all be revealed during the hiring process and could actually be deemed competencies. Hiring for other roles might require a purposeful inquiry to reveal wanted characteristics. The key is to ensure that both parties know what they're signing up for.

#### **QUOTES:**

"We are all born with a unique genetic blueprint, which lays out the basic characteristics of our personality as well as our physical health & appearance...And yet, we all know that life experiences do change us." – Joan D. Vinge

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"We cannot and must not get rid of nor deny our characteristics. But we can give them shape and direction."  
– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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#### **Additional Learnings:**

7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

Strength Finder 2.0 by Tom Rath

\*Many personality books to choose from

#### **Interview questions/tips:**

1. How would your close friends describe you? How would your colleagues describe you?
2. Walk me through your personality. What are your strengths? What feedback have you received in the past that helped you grow into who you are today?
3. Name an attribute of someone you admire that you would like to acquire/grow.

# **CONNECTION** - *relatability in the midst of similarities and differences, the "glue"*

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The ability to connect requires two invaluable attributes: empathy and engagement. Empathy by itself is still a wonderful attribute, it just misses the mark if it stays internal. Engagement by itself, however, hits the mark but can do so with damage. When combined, they can change lives for the better. Connectors are engagers with empathy. They are referred to on teams as the glue. They spark relationships and forge deep bonds with the people they touch.

## **QUOTES:**

"If only you could sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person." - Fred Rogers

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"The energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give & receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." - Brene' Brown

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"The single greatest 'people skill' is a highly developed and authentic interest in the other person." - Bob Burg

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## **Additional Learnings:**

[The Power of Understanding People](#) by Dave Mitchell

[How to Win Friends & Influence People](#) by Dale Carnegie

[Everyone Communicates Few Connect](#) by John C. Maxwell

[Atlas of the Heart](#) by Brene' Brown

## **Interview questions/tips:**

1. Connection (or lack thereof) can be one of the most assessable attributes during an interview if you're tuned in.
2. Temporarily take an opposing view in the conversation to evaluate the candidate's ability to empathize & connect in spite of that view
3. Who is the most difficult customer or colleague you've had & why? Walk me through how you handled that situation?

# **COMMUNICATION** – *there are many components of communication (clear, concise, constructive, contextual, compelling, considerate, collaborative, etc.)*

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Strong communication comes in multiple forms and it includes the receiving (listening well and seeking to understand) and the giving (conversations, writings, verbals, and non-verbals). This also includes the newly needed skill sets of communicating well in virtual platforms such as Webex, Zoom, or Skype along with written forms of communication such as email and text. In the interviewing process, many forms of communication can be evaluated; the introduction, the resume, the conversation, the follow-up, etc.

## **QUOTES**

"Wise men speak because they have something to say, fools because they have to say something." – Aristotle

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"Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee, and just as hard to sleep after." – Anne Morrow Lindbergh

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"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." – George Bernard Shaw

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## **Additional Learnings:**

[Crucial Conversations](#) by Patterson, Grenny, Switzler, McMillan

[Fierce Conversations](#) by Susan Scott

[Difficult Conversations](#) by Stone, Patten, Heen, & Fisher

## **Interview questions/tips:**

As stated above, the process of the interview itself from start to finish reveals communication skills.

1. Can you walk me through your current/previous position/product in detail as if I was deciding whether to take that role myself? (Does the candidate articulate the value proposition, the challenges, the solutions, the resources, the opportunities, etc., in an honest but compelling way?)

# **COMPETENCIES** – actual skills to do the job, abilities measured by past and present results

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I read an article the other day where the author declared that he doesn't hire skills, he hires a person. He stated that he hasn't looked at a resume in years and that he just focuses on the person in front of him. Although I appreciate his kind-hearted sentiment, I was left wondering how that works out practically. I'd love to hear his interviews and how he makes his selection without discussing in some detail the actual skills needed for specific roles with the evidence of those skills in previous experiences. Since confidence should be based on achieved results, these results should be backed by evidence (outlined by a resume). Regardless of a candidate's capacity (capability and desire to learn), I am still interested in what they already know and what they have already done. This, at the very least, gives me a starting point on their upcoming learning curve.

## **QUOTES**

"Everybody's got a different circle of competence. The important thing is not how big the circle is. The important thing is staying inside the circle." – Warren Buffett

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"Learn to do the common things uncommonly well." – George Washington Carver

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"Competence is a great creator of confidence." – Mary Jo Putney

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"The test of true competence is the end result." – L. Ron Hubbard

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## **Additional Learnings:**

\*Most roles have specific competency models, these are important to implement in assessing a candidate's current abilities

## **Interview questions/tips:**

This is where I get granular with a candidate's resume. I contrast their experiences and results with the competencies needed in the role. I ask for specific examples of "what" they did and "how" they did it. Beware of the answer, "I have many examples of x" without actually giving good examples. I would much rather hear, "I don't have experience doing that but I'm very interested and willing to learn." This emphasizes that capacity is much more important than competencies when all else is equal.

# **CHARISMA** – energy, positivity, likeability, the quality of attracting others to want to know you

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Charisma is a close cousin to connection. Connection deals with empathy and engagement, focusing externally whereas charisma is internally driven. Charisma is something we project. It comes from an inner strength based on courage and confidence. It's that joyful swagger that pulls many into its orbit and can repel others. Although some charismatic people take advantage of this internal strength and degrade its value and effect, charisma has the potential of brightening and lightening any room.

## QUOTES

"Charisma is a sparkle in people that money can't buy. It's invisible energy with visible effects." – Marianne Williamson

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"Charisma is the intangible that makes people want to follow you, to be around you, to be influenced by you." – Roger Dawson

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"People who love life have charisma because they fill the room with positive energy." – John C. Maxwell

"Charisma is the perfect blend of warmth & confidence." – Vanessa Van Edwards

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## Additional Learnings:

[Emotional Intelligence 2.0](#) by Bradberry & Greaves

[Gravitas](#) by Caroline Goyder

[Compelling People](#) by Neffinger & Kohut

## Interview questions/tips:

Charisma is sometimes hard to describe but it's impossible to miss. You don't have to ask questions regarding charisma. Even through nervousness or stress, there are still noticeable traces.



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One of my favorite interview questions (that I save toward the end) is "What's the difference between having twenty years of experience versus having one year of experience twenty times? (Most candidates stumble out loud for a little while before I give them the hint that the question implies the capacity for growth versus being stagnant). I then ask, "How have you lived out the former?" This is a slow pitch to those who have spent years purposefully growing & learning from mentors, books, courses, and other resources, along with their experiences. The capacity to learn, defined by ability and desire, is truly a game-changer. This capacity is why we need to consider someone for who they can become tomorrow and not necessarily who they are today. It's really what gives us all a chance. If you think about it, we're never actually able to do something until we've done it. This is the difference between ability and capability. This is the power of capacity.

## QUOTES

"Not by age but by capacity is wisdom acquired." – Plautus

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"The capacity to learn is a gift; the ability to learn is a skill; the willingness to learn is a choice." – Brian Herbert

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"If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you." – Zig Ziglar

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## Additional Learnings:

[The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth](#) by John C. Maxwell

[Mindset](#) by Carol Dweck

[The Talent Code](#) by Daniel Coyle

[Mastery](#) by Robert Greene

## Interview questions/tips:

What's the difference between having twenty years of experience versus 1 year of experience twenty times? (Although I mentioned above that twenty years of experience should be evidence of cumulative learning that signifies the candidate's focus on growth, I was impressed and intrigued at one of my recent candidate's opposing views. He stated that 1 year of experience twenty times (if done with the same focus on

growth) can result in mastery at a few significant skills without getting lost in broad generalistic learning. This is definitely not a wrong answer. The point is that the capacity for growth and development is the theme of the answer.

What are three to four resources that you're currently reading or actions you are taking to grow personally and/or professionally?

As I stated in the beginning, these 7 components may just be the starting point as you Hire for Excellence. The key is being purposefully aware of these important components. Awareness, however, is wasted without consistent application. In fact, awareness can be the greatest friend or the toughest foe to application. In other words, it's difficult to consistently apply a positive action unless you're aware of it, but "knowing it already" can often diminish the push to apply what you know. If you are the interviewer, I would challenge you to have these 7 components in front of you to take specific notes during your interview with a rating scale of where the candidate presents strongly and where you have concerns. (I've created a 7 C's printable grid for our subscribers). The end goal is not necessarily perfection or even balance of all the components, it's more of an intentional imbalance between what attributes you are specifically needing versus where you have flexibility. If you are the interviewee, be authentic in who you are and present these components purposefully. Relay real-life examples that highlight your strengths while being vulnerable with areas you can grow. After all, this embodies Character and Capacity, the two most valuable C's.