

Do You Hire for Character or for Competency?

Leaders are known by the company they keep—particularly their company of hires.

Careers are made and lost as a result of hiring decisions. The problem is that most leaders receive very little training in the selection of employees. Most leaders learn to hire based upon past mistakes.

I believe leaders should select a new employee on the basis of two primary criteria: competency and character. Competency is fairly simple to measure. A candidate either can or cannot. Competency is difficult to fake in the face of an experienced leader. We have learned how to spot a competent producer.

For those of us tasked with a hiring decision, perhaps the most difficult task is to assess is the character of a prospect. I pray often for “all things hidden to be revealed.” I’ve learned to pray a bit more specifically ... “Please God, reveal the hidden stuff before we hire this person.”

It is difficult to interview for character. Reference checks are important but not that revealing. Most references are leery of revealing character issues.

As with most things, I recommend the development of a system to intentionally assess character. Please consider the following interview system:

- **Add more interviews.** Most of our hiring problems occur when we rush to judgment. We need someone fast and sometimes we just move too fast. I recommend a minimum of three interviews with the primary hiring official. Perhaps there are others in your organization

that should conduct an interview as well. But I encourage the decision maker to see a candidate three times. You will have a different purpose for each interview. We don't need all 3 interviews if we are ready to eliminate a person from consideration.

- **Find standardized testing appropriate for your specific hire.** The cost of the test is much less than the costs incurred from a poor hire. I like to review test results between the first and second interview. The first interview helps me to decide if I want to pay for testing.
- **Look for fire.** We know that character is formed in the midst of fire. I recommend you spend at least one full-length interview on fire detection. Young recruits without a list of fire walks probably haven't been tested and nurtured from tough experiences. I'm leery of silver-spooned candidates. I don't know how the hire will react under the pressure of a true character test in the job. I want to know ... in most ministries ... I must know.
- **Scenarios.** Develop written scenarios of difficult situations. Prepare three to five cases common to the position. Discuss the problem with the candidate and watch for non-verbal cues as the prospect squirms through the resolution. I don't expect them to be comfortable. Fires aren't comfortable. I become leery when I hear fast, pat answers. Silver-tongue responses could be a sign of trouble.
- **Ask more questions.** I'm often surprised when a hiring officer does most of the talking in an interview. I understand the passion of a leader to tell the story of the organization. I just don't understand it during the hiring phase. Interviews have a specific purpose. I remind myself ... less of me and more of them. I want to ask open-ended questions. "Tell me your definition of character and tell me about how you have developed character throughout your life." Listen for specific

examples. Probe! Use phrases such as “Tell me more,” “Really?” and “How did you feel about that?”

Keep digging to determine depth of character.

The benefit of deep character interviews is that competency is usually revealed along the way. We have many ways to determine core competency. But doesn't character matter more to you than any other factor?

Now go a step further...

If you read this article and identified that you may not have the right staff in key positions, you are not alone. It happens, but you can do something about it. I highly recommend joining the National Institute of Christian Leadership (NICL) by Dr. Mark Rutland. Here's a few key points you'll learn in the Staff and Volunteer sessions starting in April:

- Identify your key leaders' personality types and how to bring balance to your team
- How to put the right staff in key positions. This is critical to your success
- How to organize and maximize volunteers to meet your objectives
- Walk away with the confidence needed to recruit, manage and keep volunteers in the key positions to help your organization grow

The NICL is a year-long intensive leadership training designed to take your ministry and personal leadership to the next level. It is a leadership institute designed for church, ministry, and business leaders. The year is composed of 4 separate sessions consisting of 2½ days of intensive training. In four sessions you'll be walked through dealing with management issues, budgeting, staff and volunteers, turnarounds and much more.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information on Dr. Mark Rutland's NICL.

As always, if I can help you or your organization to develop this system, please email me at @charismamedia.com.

Dr. Steve Greene is the executive vice president—Media Group, Charisma Media. Here's a link to where you can sign up for Dr. Greene's leadership e-newsletter.