

## HOW TO QUANTIFY SOFT SKILLS

Many businesses refer to their people as a precious asset. Well in a search firm, our people are our only assets and hiring the right people is the single most important step of leadership. I have seen hundreds of behavioral profiling tools, interview forms, and qualification summaries including soft skills such as hard working, dedicated, driven, empathetic, charismatic, persuasive, driven, bright, and articulate person with high integrity, self-confidence, and self-discipline. Doesn't every hiring manager want those things? The key is defining what those words mean to that hiring manager or, in your case, to YOU.

As an example, one hiring manager may define "hard working" as working 10 hour days or a 50 hour week. Another may define it as 12 hour days or a 70 hour week. While the person, in the former example, is getting an award for their work ethic another, in the latter example, may be getting fired for the same behavior. What is important is to quantify these soft skills, in the context of your office or culture, and then use them, along with the candidate's background and technical skills, to create a match.

The most important of all the soft skills we look for is "passion." We define passion as simply "a burning desire to succeed" or "a single mindedness in pursuit of any goal." In other words, to stop me you will have to kill me! It is a competitive drive that manifests itself in the form of what we call passion. To paraphrase Calvin Coolidge, "the world is full of educated derelicts and persistence alone is omnipotent." When passion meets persistence, the result is honoring commitments. If a recruiter commits to a client that they will have three candidates to them by Friday and it is Thursday and they only have one, what would they do? If the answer is not "whatever it takes" then this person does not have what we need. "Whatever it takes" should mean that this person will be here until 10pm or 11pm tonight, and come in at 6am the next morning, and will leave as many voicemails as it takes to increase the odds them fulfilling their commitment. Otherwise, they will collapse at their desk trying. Sound harsh? Perhaps, but it is the commitment that was made.

To us, honoring commitments is the bedrock of trust and integrity. If an organization makes commitments to its associates and then fails to honor them, then we consider this a corporate integrity breach. If the leaders of that organization do not immediately rectify and apologize for such an integrity breach, then it is our belief that the associate should leave for a competing organization that models corporate integrity. I share this with every new associate at Kaye/Bassman. Conversely, we consider a lack of associates' honoring their commitments as a personal integrity breach. As a result, I would expect them to course correct immediately and apologize to the person adversely affected by the failed commitment or I would ask them reconsider their desire to remain at a firm that allows its associates to make commitments and not honor them.

Whether you call it passion, commitment, dedication, or integrity, what is important is not the word itself but the ability to hire people who embody the essence of the word. People can only demonstrate this passion when they feel that their work has a meaningful purpose and is reflective of their personal values. Many people are interested in success but interest and commitment are not the same. As in the case of a ham and eggs breakfast where the chicken is involved but the pig is committed!!!

Hiring for our business is much harder than for our clients since we rarely hire people who are doing exactly what we want done at one of our competitors. We must use every tool available to help us in our interviewing and hiring. However, it all starts with defining what you value and attracting people who share those similar values. Once that is done then you can refer back to the information in this article.

So, the next time you convey a series of soft skills that you and everyone else wants, ask yourself, "what do these words mean to me and our firm?" The next time you take a search assignment and the hiring manager begins to rattle off the same typical soft skills, ask him or her "What does (insert word) look like from your perspective or your firm's?"

### **Don't Take Another Job Order Without Asking These 4 Questions**

Wow, you have a great Job Order! You cleared your fee and know everything about the position. You have a good rapport with the hiring authority. You are excited and ready to start making calls and "fill this puppy" quickly! Everything is set, right? Maybe yes... maybe no!

We spend a lot of time and attention on getting details and understanding motivation from our candidates. It will serve us well to consider taking a more "candidate-focused" approach to understanding our clients' needs, as well. Let me explain.

We understand that people are motivated by how their *life* is being affected by their job. We understand that the best way to approach people is by inquiring about, focusing upon and satisfying their needs and wants. Satisfy needs and you'll have a robust practice.

We often forget that our *hiring authorities* are people too. The job order you want to fill should have a direct affect on them personally in some significant way. I want to know how *much* it affects them. Before I invest a few days to weeks of my life in a search, I want to know if having the position open is really a *problem*. And if so, how *big* a problem it is. The bigger the problem, the greater the motivation to follow my advice and a process that will assure success. I have never found anyone willing to spend a lot of time and effort to solve an inconsequential problem.

To identify how committed a client is, I make sure I ask 4 questions in this order:

#### **1. How long has the position been open?**

- There seems to be a direct relationship between how long a position has been open and how urgent/important filling it is to a hiring authority.
- However beware of positions that have been open for more than 6 months. They may have become accustomed to doing the work themselves and become desensitized to the pain of having it unfilled.

#### **2. How is the work being done now?**

- I always want to hear that they are paying big bucks for a contractor or overtime and that the work is indeed being done
- I like it more when the *hiring authority* has to do the work themselves. That way they really feel the pain.
- Beware of "I don't know." No pain, no problem, no urgency... no fee.

### 3. What is it costing you to have the position open?

- Of course if they are paying big bucks for a contractor or overtime, you want to *quantify* that dollar amount and quote it back to them in total “annual dollars”. Making it larger than a monthly cost puts it into perspective and reduces fee-sensitivity.
- Be *sure* to probe for non-monetary costs. What is it costing them personally? Working evenings and weekends and missing family outings can be huge in terms of their costs ...and pain.
- Perhaps not having this position filled will cost the hiring authority’s department revenue and ultimately his/her bonus. Now *that’s* a biggie!
- Generally, the more the personal costs the greater the pain. The greater the pain, the more they’ll work your way.

### 4. How will your life be once it’s filled?

- This is where you really want to hear a *deep sigh* and a response that indicates “relief”. Listen to *what* is said and *how* it is said.
- If they cannot define this, refer to the personal costs they have stated in #3 above and how it would feel to eliminate those costs... in personal terms.

Empathize with them whenever they express pain and make sure they know you care and can make the pain go away, “if...” Then propose a process to get it done. If there is enough pain, and you’ll hear it if there is, they will follow your lead.

Asking these questions very early in the process of taking a job order, and carefully listening to their answers will help you get comfortable with how emotionally committed your client will be to the process and to you. Without a strong commitment, you are gambling your time and, if working on a contingent basis, could be working for free.



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*They have recently introduced new distance based learning programs and an entirely new subscription based program through an innovative delivery medium called NLE TV. To learn more about these programs or their other offerings please check out [www.nlrtraining.com](http://www.nlrtraining.com) or [www.nextlevelexchange.com](http://www.nextlevelexchange.com). You can also email Jeff at [jtk@nlrtraining.com](mailto:jtk@nlrtraining.com).*