

Your Most Important Decision



Quick self-check: what flashed through your mind when you first saw that headline? What's truly your most important decision?

I'm going to suggest that it's *people*: *Hiring* the right folks, putting them on the right *teams*, and even just hanging out with people that *uplift*.

For now let's focus on *hiring and promoting*. I'd like to suggest four criteria that operate mostly unconsciously (or maybe not at all) in that decision-making process. The suggestion is to make these criteria explicit and serious. The promise is that you'll have a vastly more productive and happy team if you do that. In order of importance:

Values

Try to discover what *drives* the person. What are her deepest values? This is not easy, because *real* values often hide below the surface. Is it all about *me*? Or do I value the well-being of others, such as my team and my customers? Getting rich or famous? Meaningful work? Work/life balance? Healthy relationships? Helping other people and the planet? What are this person's top values?

An important consideration is that the candidate's values align reasonably well with those of the organization. If they don't, you'll run into serious conflicts down the road.

Aptitude

Aptitude is more important than their acquired skills and the big list of classes they've taken. It's their *inborn talent*. For example, some people are just plain good at math, physics, fixing busted things, building gizmos...they are natural *engineers* (this includes *me*, by the way!). They love it. Good school, mediocre school, or even no school...when someone has the right DNA, the right native aptitude, their chances of success are high.

Coachability

Do they respond to your guidance, or do they dig in? I like to ask slightly tricky interview questions to probe for coachability. If they're not really coachable, well, they may be a genius prima donna who really adds value to your group; but they may be such a pain in the neck that it's just not worth it! We've all seen both.

Skills

Yes, of course! I'm frequently amazed at interview situations where nobody probes for the actual skills required by the job. It's easy to get swayed by very friendly or very persuasive personalities, but at the end of the day you need skills. Test for those specific skills! Give them real situations and see what they'd do.

But just remember: if they're a little shy on skills but are strong on the other three criteria, the chances are good that they can develop the specific skills on the job.

You've hired people and built teams. Does this ring true? If so, I'd recommend structuring interviews and hiring/promotion situations along these lines. You'll be glad you did!