

THE RETAIL observer

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AN EYE ON THE INDUSTRY SINCE 1970



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PART ONE



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PERSONALITY AND PERFORMANCE

Key attributes of great employees

What are the characteristics of a great employee? How can you identify those qualities as you conduct the hiring process – and how can you track the employees' performance after you've hired them?

The first quality you should look for is personality. If the position you're looking to fill requires the employee to interact with customers and other employees, personality is critical.

If, on the other hand, the position involves little human contact, personality isn't nearly as important. We all know and have worked with people who were content to sit alone in a cubbyhole and go about their business. For example, many accountants might be more comfortable juggling numbers in solitary silence than working with people. I'm not being dismissive – these folks provide a valuable service, too – but they probably wouldn't find personal connections as exciting.

When you meet with candidates for a position that requires human interaction, go with your gut. What's your initial reaction? How do you feel about the candidate's demeanor? Are they pleasant? Relaxed? Are they people you quickly feel a connection with, and who'll form good connections with your team?

Do they smile? Vernon Hill, founder of Commerce Bank and Metro Bank in London, is the world's most customer-driven banker. He says, "If they don't smile in the first interview, there's no second interview."

Personality is evident in many ways – for example, in the way the candidate is dressed. I'm not suggesting that they should dress expensively, but I do stress that their hair and clothes be clean, indicating that they have a certain pride and self-respect.

How they look will reflect how they see and value themselves. If they dress with flair, you can assume that they're creative and self-assured. Creativity is a great attribute, because they're likely to bring fresh ideas. Also, pay attention to candidates' body language and how they carry themselves. For example, people who lean

forward as you talk are letting you know that they're interested in what you have to say.

Another example is good posture, which indicates that the interviewee is confident, which is another positive trait. However, you want to hire people who are confident, not arrogant. Arrogance and a superior attitude won't go over well with your customers or with your team members. Instead, hire people who can think quickly, analyze a situation, and use their resources confidently to solve problems.

If candidates have these qualities, hire them. They'll welcome your customers with a smile and a can-do attitude. They'll form connections with the customers that will keep the customers coming back. Remember: You can train for skills, but you can't train for attitude.

It's important also to understand that most people can be charming for 30 minutes, but they'll find it difficult to sustain that façade over the long term. Once you've hired a new employee, keep track of their performance – talk to their coworkers and managers. Are the hires performing at acceptable, or exceptional, levels?

Also, conduct regular performance reviews with your new employees. Ask for their feedback. How do they feel they are doing? What help would they welcome from you? How can you best provide it? Do everything you can to provide these employees with what they need to perform at their highest level.

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