

TRUTH

1

There is no such thing as
the ideal candidate

 We all know what makes an ideal candidate. We all want employees with a great attitude, strong work ethic, high energy, and strong motivation. We also want employees who can work as part of a team, provide great customer service, and have passion about their work and loyalty to their employer. Right? Wrong!

There is no universally ideal candidate. In fact, we all have slightly different ideas about what makes a great employee.

At a hiring seminar, managers were asked to identify the traits of their ideal candidate, with wildly varying results. Some wanted an assistant who thought like they did; others wanted someone with skills opposite their own. Certain managers wanted their employees to have the ability to think independently; others wanted people who could follow the established practices and procedures prescribed by their organization. Some wanted assistants who would be bubbly and outgoing; others wanted introverts who could work on their own.

For example, in a company where employees must work together as a cohesive team, the quality of team orientation will be paramount in the job specifications. However, some organizations, such as home health agencies with employees who travel to the homes of frail, elderly, and sick clients, may need strong individual contributors who can work independently to solve problems while in the client's home. While many organizations, such as graphic design studios, value creativity and originality of thought, other organizations, like fast food restaurants and banks, may need food service workers or bank tellers to follow very specific guidelines and policies for doing their work.

Similarly, you may believe that going to "A" schools is the way to get "A" candidates. This isn't necessarily true. For example, when Kentucky Fried Chicken was recruiting for fast track managers, it found that some of the "best" schools' students weren't necessarily open to supervisory roles in fast food, although they had a great track record of promoting into top management those who began as food service associates or as supervisors. In fact, they discovered that when they attended some of the career

**There is no
universally ideal
candidate.**

fairs at the best hospitality management schools, students were not looking at fast food as their ultimate goal. They also discovered that one of the best colleges for recruitment efforts was at a local college that had many nontraditional students (older students with a strong work history). Recruitment success—from a B school!

As you outline the key candidate dimensions, make sure you also assess your culture to ensure there's a match between what you need from your employees and what you have to offer them in terms of consistency and culture. To get a handle on what your organizational and departmental culture is all about, think about “who we are,” “what we do,” and “how we do it.” Check your answers with your colleagues to see if there is consistent agreement. You might also conduct a focus group with your team or strategize at a retreat or staff meeting. Your rank-and-file employees, front-line employees, and customers may see your organization differently. Your leaders may see the company as a service-driven organization, which may be true of your external positioning but may not be true in how the company actually responds to employee needs and concerns.

One organization identified its core values, sometimes called *organizational competencies*, by gathering groups of employees and supervisors to discuss what it was the organization valued in terms of behaviors. The groups were asked, “When you observe employees exhibiting the values of this organization, what do you see or hear them doing?” Through a series of focus groups and managerial discussions, this organization was able to create its list of the groups’ organizational values, which were then used as a tool in employee selection and in performance management. This process allowed this business to not only select employees who were aligned with its values, but also to then reinforce the behaviors it wanted to see in its employees.



To get a handle on what your organizational and departmental culture is all about, think about “who we are,” “what we do,” and “how we do it.”