

# Spotting Talent in Your Team

Brought to you by Assemble You. It's time to work on *you*, so sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, otherwise known as CIPD, states that having a talent management strategy should be "a key priority for organizations." [1] A critical element to a successful talent management strategy is talent spotting - recruiting employees with **potential**. Today, we'll focus on that.

We've all encountered newly hired employees who look perfect on paper but whose performance is poor when they get down to work. We've also come across employees who take on new roles without a scrap of experience yet perform exceptionally. What's the difference between those employees who fail and those who do extraordinarily well? According to Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, writing in the Harvard Business Review, the difference is potential - in other words, "the ability to adapt to and grow into increasingly complex roles and environments." [2]

Over the next few minutes, we will focus on **potential**, and specifically:

- Why the potential of employees is vital to talent management strategies
- What the five main characteristics of potential are and
- What employers can do to ensure that they discover the potential of job candidates at interviews

Technology and AI have shifted the focus of the business landscape. Requirements are changing at a frightening pace – some jobs are rapidly disappearing, while just as quickly, others are emerging. For example, you may have noticed that the role of receptionist has become less common in recent years as many companies have moved to computerised visitor management systems. Online data portal *LMI for All* predicts that as a result, the number of receptionist vacancies will contract 30.2% by 2027 [3]. At the same time, LinkedIn reports [4] that the role of frontline e-commerce worker -

which requires relatively new and tech-focused people - is the top 'in-demand job in 2021', with hiring for these jobs growing 73% year on year.

Recruiters can no longer rely on candidates merely "ticking the boxes" at a specific time. Qualifications, experience, and past performance are no longer the most reliable predictors of future success [5].

They are now seeking to recruit people with *potential* - the ability to succeed and adapt. Those with high potential should significantly contribute to the business's success in the short term and the longer term as they achieve their higher levels of potential. The question now is not "does this candidate have the right skills" it is "do they have the potential to keep learning new ones."

How can employers assess whether candidates possess this potential? In Fernández-Aráoz's HBR article *21st-Century Talent Spotting* [2], he tells us that there are five "hallmarks of potential." These are

1. **Motivation** – *a fierce commitment to excel in the pursuit of unselfish goals, to show deep humility, and invest in getting better at everything they do*
2. **Curiosity** – *a penchant for seeking out new experiences, knowledge, and candid feedback, and an openness to learning and change*
3. **Insight** – *the ability to gather and make sense of information that suggests new possibilities*
4. **Engagement** – *a knack for using emotion and logic to communicate a compelling vision and connect with people and...*
5. **Determination** – *the wherewithal to fight for difficult goals despite challenges and to bounce back from adversity.*

In his career as an executive searcher in the 1980s, Fernández-Aráoz struggled to find a suitable candidate for the post of Project Manager for a brewery.

Ultimately, he contacted Pedro Alforta, an executive he had met while studying at Stanford University. While Pedro had no experience in consumer goods nor any experience in marketing or sales, his unique background demonstrated his extraordinary **potential**. A survivor of a 1972 plane crash in the Andes, he had displayed all the necessary characteristics during this traumatic experience. Rather than succumbing to despair, Pedro took on several tasks, such as providing sustenance to the explorers who would leave the crash site and find help to save the group. Through his curiosity about the environment, Pedro realized that the dying pilot had misreported their position and was able to work out where they were for the rescue team. He also encouraged fellow survivors to maintain hope for the 72 days before their rescue.

While Pedro had no experience in the brewery trade, he had shown skills that Fernández-Aráoz believed provided him with the potential to succeed. Alforta multiplied sales eightfold, achieved record profits, and played a crucial role in the expansion and transformation of the business. He used his engagement skills to instigate open meetings where all employees were encouraged to voice their concerns

and ideas, and his intense curiosity led him to try innovative ideas that proved to be hugely successful.

How then can **you** assess whether your candidates possess potential?

You must become a highly skilled interviewer. Prepare thoroughly before interviews - think carefully about the questions you will ask and look for stories in their work and private life that illustrate they have the essential qualities.

Consider the questions you will ask candidates and make sure that they offer them the chance to demonstrate their potential.

To assess whether someone has **determination**, you could ask:

*Can you tell me about a time when you faced a major obstacle? How did you overcome it?*

For assessing **motivation**, you could try this approach:

*Describe an idea that you had that was great for your team and your company. How do you get your team and company excited about it? How did you follow it through so that your idea came to life?*

For **determination**, you could go with:

*Tell me about a time when you were faced with a major obstacle. How did you overcome it?*

For **curiosity** consider this:

*Tell me something you have taught yourself in the last six months. How did you go about teaching yourself this, and how have you used what you learned?*

For **insight**, a solid approach could be to ask:

*Describe a time when you had to make a difficult choice at work, how did you come to your decision?*

Finally, for **engagement**:

*Describe a time when you have engaged others in an idea that they were not initially in favour of*

Delve deep into candidates' responses to your questions - this will give you more insight into their potential. Candidates, quite rightly, prepare for interviews by predicting what they are likely to be asked and will be ready with appropriate responses. It is by looking further into the stories that they tell that you will find out whether candidates really have, or lack, the key qualities.

Successful candidate Siara was asked only three questions in her interview for the role of Business Development Executive with a global training organisation. All tested her potential, and while she found the depth of the follow-up questions to be intense and challenging, she was pleased to be allowed to demonstrate her star potential. Siara

has enjoyed a rewarding career with this company and has brought many new and innovative ideas to the organization while progressing quickly into new and exciting roles.

Once you have hired candidates like Siara who have that star potential, your aim will be to keep them and to 'maintain a robust talent pipeline'. You will not achieve this by letting them stand still. Rather, you must keep them engaged and motivated, and push them to excel. This way your 'potentials' will continue to develop, learn and lead others to deliver amazing results.

Today we have focused on an important part of your Talent Management Strategy - Talent Spotting. We have discussed how digital disruption and the shifting workforce mean that looking for candidates who are simply a good match for any job no longer works, rather we are now seeking to recruit people with high potential. We have discussed the 5 characteristics that high potentials possess and how to uncover that potential through the use of carefully thought-out interview questions and techniques. You are now in a position to go out and talent spot with confidence.

This week, we encourage you to put some time aside to speak to your team members individually. If they want to share, find out what is happening with your people inside and outside of work. People remember managers who helped them when they needed it and feel extra motivated to work for those managers. See if there's anything you can do to make someone's life easier or reduce work-related anxiety. It'll be worth it.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

[1] *Talent management*, CIPD (2023)

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/factsheets/talent-factsheet/>

[2] *21st-Century Talent Spotting*, Claudio Fernández-Aráoz (2014)

<https://hbr.org/2014/06/21st-century-talent-spotting>

[3] *Labour market and skills projections: 2017 to 2027*

<https://www.lmiforall.org.uk/2020/02/labour-market-and-skills-projections-2017-to-2027/>

[4] LinkedIn Jobs on the Rise: 15 Opportunities That Are in Demand and Hiring Now, Andrew Seaman/LinkedIn (2021)

[5] *Is past performance the best predictor for future performance? Lesson for recruiters*, Mashudu Nethavhani (2021)

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/past-performance-best-predictor-future-lesson-mashudu-nethavhani/>