

TALENT AND THE HIRING PROCESS

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April 5, 2010

There is no magic bullet formula that can be applied to every organization to ensure perfect hiring and long-term retention of employees. Organizational cultures differ. What works in one culture may not work in another. Hiring and retention efforts must be tailored to the specific culture of the organization.

Hiring and retaining outstanding employees are a function of a number of interacting factors: pay and perks that are competitive in the local marketplace; knowing what you are looking for; finding someone to match what you are looking for; finding someone who is compatible with the organizational culture; effective screening of candidates; skilled interviews; steps used to help the new employee fit into the organization; the training, coaching, and support given to employees; and the degree to which managers facilitate internal motivation. Critical questions must be asked and specific steps taken during each of the following eight phases of a hiring and retention process.

BEFORE HIRING	AFTER HIRING
<p style="text-align: center;">— 1 — Determine What You Are Looking For</p> <p><i>Match To:</i> <i>Mission & Values Of The Organizational Culture</i></p> <p><i>Study Your Best:</i> <i>Skills v Knowledge Talent v Experience</i></p> <p><i>Include Analysis Of Exit Interviews</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">— 5— Implement An Effective Orientation Process</p> <p><i>Anchor Orientation in Mission, Values, & Culture Provide Employee with Needed Information Assign Employee a Mentor Matched to Talent</i></p> <p><i>Involve Managers & Include Tour Of Organization</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">— 2 — Use An Effective Screening Metric</p> <p><i>Key Questions About:</i> <i>Skills v Talent Knowledge v Experience</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">— 6 — Implement An Effective Training Program That Reinforces Talents And Skills</p> <p><i>Include Organizational Mission & Values, Product Knowledge, Relevant Work Processes, And Interpersonal Skills</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">— 3 — Use Appropriate Interview Questions</p> <p><i>Direct Knowledge & Skills Questions Follow-Up Experience Questions Open-Ended Questions For Talent Interview</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">— 7 — Coach & Track Performance During Probationary Period, Supporting Talent</p> <p><i>Use Performance-Based Tracking Method Department Meetings Include Team Support Manager And Mentor Coach Daily</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">— 4 — Interview And Decide</p> <p><i>Interviews For Non-Talent Attributes</i> <i>Interview For Talent Stands Alone</i></p> <p><i>Involve Other Employees In Interviews & Hiring Decisions</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">— 8 — Facilitate Internal Motivation</p> <p><i>Identify Employee's Internal Needs & Talents Match Needs and Talents to Incentives Reward Long-Term Employment With Special Incentives</i></p>

This paper is focused on one critical component of the overall hiring process (highlighted in red in the above table): *talent*. Five steps are discussed and an example is described for hiring talented sales-people.

THE TALENT HIRING PROCESS[®]

The Talent Hiring Process[®] is a series of steps for including and integrating the identification of and support for *talent* in the hiring process.

This process is not simply a set of standardized measures used from organizations, but a process specifically tailored to an organization client.

As described on the following pages Talent is different from knowledge, skills, competencies, and experience. Talent is a characteristic way of seeing and responding to the world—it is so automatic, so natural to a person, he or she doesn't even identify it as something special, let alone as a talent. It is assessed differently than other factors in the hiring process, and is a key factor in determining the success of a new-hire.

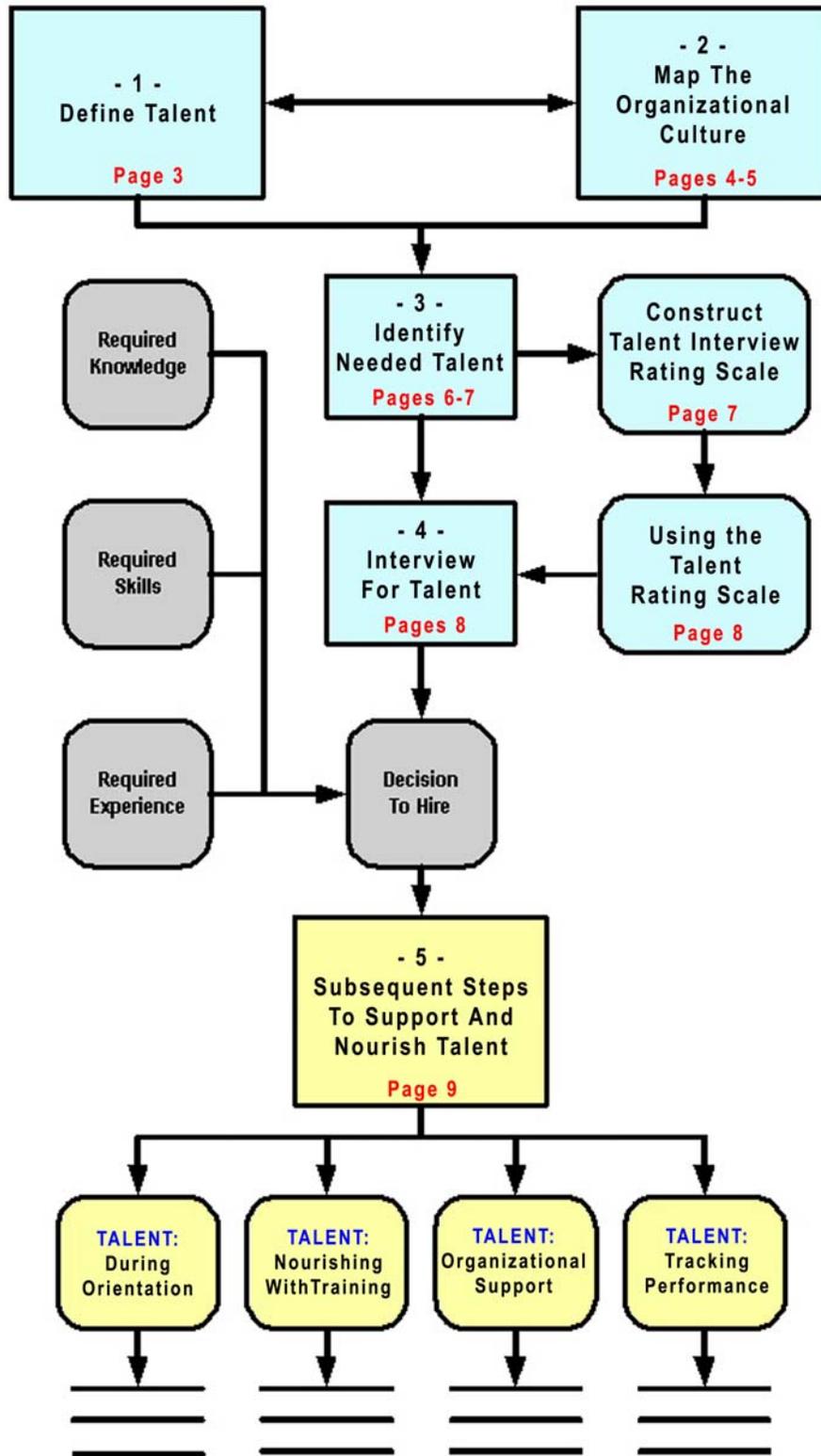
The Talent Hiring Process[®] involves every level of an organization. It takes place over a period of a 3 to 5 day immersion in the organization, depending on the size of the organization. The end results of the process are valuable to the organization in four ways:

1. The process is free of any organizational-cultural-bias when implemented by objective, external Facilitators.
2. The process is not a “canned” set of measures. It is specifically tailored to a particular organization.
3. At the end of the process, the organization will have a methodology for identifying, assessing, selecting, hiring, and supporting talent, tailored to the organizational culture.
4. There is an additional side benefit to the organization. Because of the way the process is constructed (particularly during Step 2), management will be made aware of personnel and process issues in the organization that could be addressed by them in further initiatives.

The next page displays an overview of the steps involved in the Talent Hiring Process[®].

Succeeding pages describe each step in more detail.

OVERVIEW OF THE¹ TALENT HIRING PROCESS[®]



¹ Blue objects refer to the talent portion of the selection and hiring-decision process. Gray objects refer to the usual elements of the selection and hiring-decision process. Yellow objects refer to the post-hiring nurturing of talent.

1. Define Talent

To begin with, it is very important to explain what the word *talent* means.

People who use typical hiring methods tend to focus on such factors as experience (including recommendations), knowledge, skills, and defined competencies. There is no question that these are important considerations in hiring someone.

However, *talent* is something different. The increasing accumulation of brain research in recent years demonstrates how a large portion of our individual brains are wired the same, but yet smaller portions are uniquely different. For example, as a result of reviewing current research, John Medina, in his fascinating book, *Brain Rules*, states:

Our brains have the neural equivalents of large interstate freeways, turnpikes, and state highways. These big trunks are the same from one person to the next, functioning in yours about the same way they function in mine. It's when you get to the smaller routes—the brain's equivalent of residential streets, alleys, and dirt roads—that individual patterns begin to show up. Every brain has a lot of these smaller paths, and in no two people are they identical.²

By the time we reach adulthood we each see the world through our own complex set of mental filters. Some of us are naturally optimistic. Some of us are pessimistic. Some of us are very well organized. Some of us are natural people persons. These filters determine how we react and respond to people and events in the world around us. They are the foundation of our *talents*. They define the characteristic way we have of dealing with our world. As Buckingham and Coffman say in their fascinating book, *First Break All The Rules*:

Talents are the four-lane highways in your mind, those that carve your recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior.³

A *talent* exhibits itself in behavior that is so automatic and so regular in a person that he or she doesn't even recognize it as something special.

It's important to note that knowledge, skills, and defined competencies are different than talent. You acquire knowledge and skills through experience, education, and practice. Anyone can be given new knowledge or taught new skills. *Talent* is “what comes naturally to you.” It is a given.

Competencies are a little more complicated. They are sometimes skills, sometimes knowledge that can be applied, sometimes *talent*-based, and sometimes a combination of two or more of these.

But, again, *talent* is a given. You cannot teach someone a particular talent. *Talent* is behavior natural to you, not acquired by learning and practicing. *Talent* is the manifestation of your uniqueness.

Managers may fail, even though they have excellent skills and vast knowledge, because they lack the people skills needed in their particular organization.

Selecting for *talent*, therefore, must be included as an important component of the hiring process.

In implementing the Talent Hiring Process[®] in an organization, the Facilitator trains everyone involved in the hiring process about the nature of *talent* and provides them with specific examples.

² Adapted from: *Brain Rules* by John Medina (Seattle: Pear Press), 2008, pp. 62-63.

³ *First Break All The Rules* by Marcus Buckingham & Curt Coffman, (New York: Simon & Schuster), 1999, p.84.

2. Map The Organizational Culture

The second step is identifying the organizational culture. This is an important step when selecting for *talent* because some organizational cultures will be supportive of particular *talent* while others will foster an environment that will make it impossible for the *talent* to flourish.

For purposes of the Talent Hiring Process[®], I define “organizational culture” as the socio-process environment of the organization:

- ◆ The socio part of this definition refers to the norms⁴ of the organization—interpersonal, interdepartmental and/or intersectional, managerial, and top leadership.
 - Interpersonal refers to the tone of interactions among people in the organization. Are people generally out for themselves, protecting themselves from criticism and promoting their own agendas or are they genuinely open and collaborative?
 - Interdepartmental and/or intersectional refers to the working arrangements among departments and/or sections. Does each division protect its own turf, pointing fingers and assessing blame when things go wrong or do they communicate and work smoothly and efficiently together as one whole organization?
 - Managerial (including Supervisors) refers to the accepted management style in the organization. Are managers controlling micromanagers who focus more on tasks with little sensitivity to employee needs or are they coaching and problem solving managers who establish objectives for each employee and work hard at bringing out their best?
 - Top leadership refers to the leadership styles of the one or more persons at the top of the organization. Are they authoritarian, bottom-line leaders who rarely communicate to or have contact with their employees or do they contact and inspire, communicate, and support people throughout the organization?
- ◆ The process part of this definition refers to the kinds processes and policies characterizing the organization. Are people rule-bound by rigid structures and steps for the way work gets done or do they have the encouragement and freedom to continually modify and improve procedures for getting things done.
- ◆ Overall, is the organizational atmosphere competitive or collaborative, structured or unstructured, homogeneous or diverse, and so on?

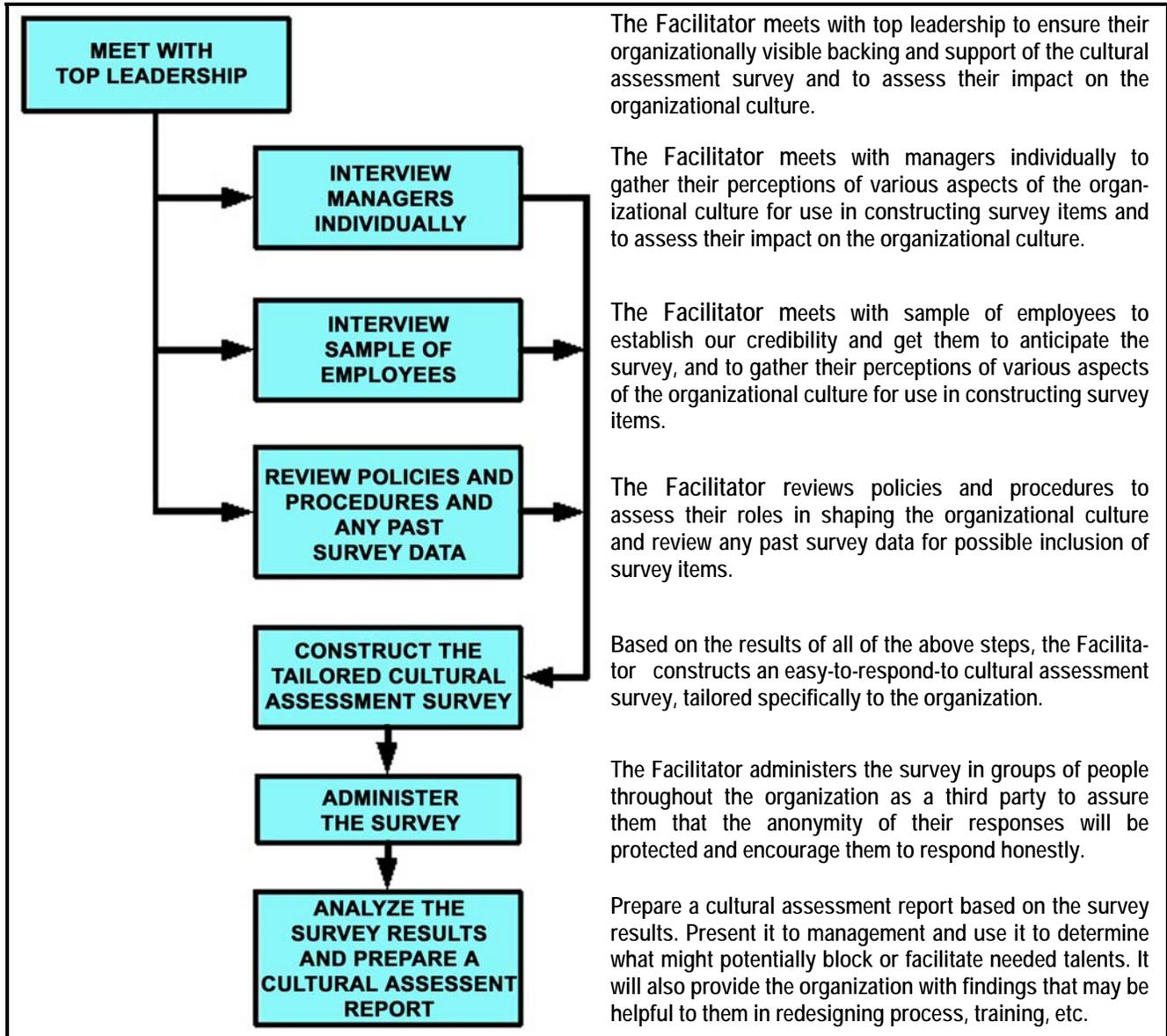
During this second step of the Talent Hiring Process[®], the Facilitator maps the organizational culture to determine whether desired talents will thrive in the organization or be thwarted.

This step is accomplished by completing the sequence of actions shown in the diagram on the next page. It is called a “participative survey.” Completion of this survey gives the Facilitator a multi-level, organization-wide perspective of the organization.

Incidentally, the results derived from this step often provide additional value to the organization beyond identifying what talents will be compatible with the organizational culture—many organizational issues and concerns are illuminated by the participative survey, along with suggestions for dealing with them.

⁴ Expected patterns of behavior.

Sequence Of Actions Taken During Step 2



3. Identify The Needed Talent

This third step of the Talent Hiring Process[®] is focused on identifying the needed *talent*. Three general strategies are available for use, each with very specific steps:

1. ***Determining the needed talents as perceived by both the top manager of the organization and the appropriate person(s) responsible for the new-hire.***
 - This is accomplished through interviews with the appropriate people. However, it can only be done after they have given a solid understanding of what *talent* means and how it is different from knowledge, skills, experience, and competencies.
2. ***Studying people who have performed the best in comparable positions in other parts of the organization.*** This would include both those currently employed and people who have been employed in the past.
 - This strategy varies as a function of the size of the organization and the job category of the new-hire. For example, when hiring top managers, more people are available for study in a large organization than in a smaller one. Or, for example, in parts of the organization where several people are working at the same basic jobs (such as salespeople), there is more opportunity to study those who have been the best performers to determine the *talents* that made them successful.
3. ***Reviewing research studies that focus on outstanding performance in particular positions or case studies of top performing people in those positions to determine the talents behind their success.***
 - Professional journals, business publications, Internet articles, workshops and conferences, etc. are all potential sources for reporting research and case studies about top performers.

Identifying *talents* should be one of the most important components of the hiring process. Knowledge can be gained, skills can be taught, and experience can be acquired. But, *talented* people are *doing what comes naturally*.

An example of the results of Step 3, focusing on hiring good salespeople, is presented on the next page.

During this step of the Talent Hiring Process[®], the Facilitator provides the people involved in the hiring process with specific strategies and exercises for identifying needed talent, including examples.

Once the key talent or talents are identified and described in detail, the Facilitator applies that information to the construction of a rating scale, which is used at the end of the Step 4 of the Talent Hiring Process[®] (described on page 9).

Example Of Identifying Needed Talent In Selecting A Salesperson

In this example, a retail organization with several outlets wanted to set up a procedure for hiring top salespeople. With the assistance of a facilitator, Sales Managers from the each of outlets met as a group with the CEO to discuss what they collectively perceived to be the needed talents.

Each, individually, was asked to think about the best salespeople they had (as well as the best they had ever known) and list what they saw as their *natural talents*. In addition, with the facilitator's help, they reviewed research and other literature dealing with the characteristics of outstanding salespeople.

They then shared their suggestions and ideas gathered in their review of the research and other literature and arrived at a consensus, agreeing on the four most important talents shown below:

Naturally Good At Communicating With People

They are naturally excellent listeners, able to sense the reactions of people and notice subtle clues. They are highly empathetic and understanding of a person's needs and wants when those desires are not even articulated. They have the ability to clearly and persuasively communicate what they are trying to say.

Naturally Good At Relating With People

They develop a relationship with everyone they talk to, quickly putting them at ease and stimulating the feeling in people that they are really trying to help them with their purchase, not just make a sale. They are able to quickly bond with a person.

Naturally Competitive With Themselves

They are passionately committed to succeed. They are goal-oriented. They are driven to do their best. They are always looking for ways to do even better. They are willing to do whatever it takes to succeed.

Naturally Positive Presentation To Others

They convey a confident, positive attitude. They are well dressed and their demeanor is open but yet professional. They are enthusiastic about what they do and seen by others as obviously enjoying what they are doing

The Facilitator then assisted the group in translating the above talent descriptions into a 5-point rating scale for use in Step 4:

1. Shows passion and enthusiasm for sales—sees selling as having fun.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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2. Has the ability to clearly and persuasively communicate what he or she is trying to say.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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3. Is driven to do well, to be competent, the best, with the ability to learn and apply what is learned.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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4. Relates well with people with a likeable and engaging personality.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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5. A naturally excellent listener, able to sense the reactions of people and notice subtle clues.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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6. Highly empathetic and understanding of what is wanted.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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7. Easily develops a relationship with everyone he or she talks to, quickly putting people at ease	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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8. Is able to quickly bond with the interviewers.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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9. Has a confident, positive attitude, presenting self with a professional demeanor.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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10. Is goal-oriented.	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UNACCEPTABLE</td><td colspan="3">←</td><td>→</td><td>OUTSTANDING</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	UNACCEPTABLE	←			→	OUTSTANDING
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4. Interview For Talent

This fourth step of the Talent Hiring Process[®] describes the conduct of interviews of prospective new-hires to determine if they exhibit the needed *talent*. This is a very important step in the Talent Hiring Process[®].

In most organizations, job candidates are interviewed more than once. Standard questions are asked to determine how the level and amount of the candidate's skills, knowledge, and experience.

Interviewing for *talent* should not be included in these sessions. It is best to interview for *talent* in a separate session, preferably the first interviewing session scheduled.

The *talent* interview is different than other hiring interviews in an important way. In those other interviews, the interviewer often asks direct, closed-ended questions such as "What do you know about...?" designed to elicit specific information from the candidate. Often in those kinds of interviews, a sharp candidate can tell what is being sought in the interview and responds in ways that will satisfy the interviewer.

The *talent* interview questions are different. They tend to be open-ended, broader questions that don't have any obviously preferred responses. For example, "Tell me about the most exciting thing that has ever happened to you." This kind of question has a better chance of eliciting a more spontaneous response—a response that reveals to the interviewer what energizes and excites the candidate—in other words, what feeds his or her natural *talent*.

The thinking behind this strategy is that the candidate will be unable to determine what the interviewer is looking for when faced with open-ended questions. As a result, the candidate will respond in ways he or she more naturally behaves. This makes it easier for the interview to discover the candidate's true *talent*.

During the asking of such questions during the *talent* interview, the interviewer listens carefully for a number of indications that the candidate has the needed *talent*. In answering questions, the interviewer listens for:

- ◆ The situations that consistently excite the candidate, lighting up his or her countenance.
- ◆ The experiences that seem to be the most fully satisfying to the candidate.
- ◆ The kinds of skills the client has been able to most easily learn.

Since *talent* is behavior that "comes naturally" to a person, the interviewer watches for natural, automatic, behavior, especially when it is recurrent during the course of the interview.

In addition, when asked a question about how the candidate would handle a particular situation, the interviewer listens for a quick, specific, real-life example, rather than a general description of how the situation might be approached.

Upon completion of an interview session, each interviewer rates the candidate using the rating scale and provides specific examples supporting his or her ratings. When all interviewers have completed the ratings, they meet to compare results and arrive at a consensus about the candidate.

During this step of the Talent Hiring Process[®], the Facilitator trains the people involved in the hiring process how to conduct the talent interview, and gives them practice with specific talent scenarios.

5. Subsequent Steps To Support And Nourish Talent

Although this step takes place after the candidate is hired, I regard it as an important component of the hiring process because it ensures that the *talent* will be supported and reinforced.

An overview of the key elements involved in this step is shown in the second column of the diagram on page 1. While detailed descriptions of those elements are described more fully in other papers, the following points highlight their most important features:

- ◆ A first element in supporting a particular *talent* is to pair the candidate with a suitable “mentor” during the orientation process. This would be a person who has the same or similar *talent*, or who thoroughly understands and can support the candidate’s *talent*. The role of the mentor is to familiarize the candidate with the organization, including a tour of the facility and introductions to key people in various sections.
- ◆ Following orientation, the candidate should be given any available training that will support and or reinforce his or her particular *talent*. This may be an existing program given to all new-hires or an off-site workshop or training session. It may take place immediately or over time as the new-hire becomes more integrated into the organization.
- ◆ Most organizations have a probationary period for new-hires. Actions during this period are very important to nurturing his or her *talent*. Clear objectives must be spelled out for the new-hire, along with milestones or metrics for successfully achieving them, and he or she must be coached in ways designed to strengthen his or her *talent*.
- ◆ Successfully identifying appropriate incentives to motivate the new-hire involves matching them to his or her internal needs. For example, some people are driven by a need more for recognition than they are for a bonus (which is a more temporary incentive). For them, representing the organization at a conference or highlighting them in newsletters or press releases will mean more to them than a bonus. If a person’s *talent* is communicating to audiences, give him or her opportunities to do so in the name of the organization in conferences or community events. And so on.

The above bullet paragraphs simply summarize activities involved in Step 5. The major point is that an individual can apply his or her *talent* more effectively if it is nurtured, supported, and reinforced by the organization.