

What is Talent Anyway?

The prevailing definition of talent, at least for the moment, seems to be that it denotes a rare skill. We use the word as a catchphrase for those hard-to-find Python programmers, clinical scientists and mechanical engineers whom hiring managers seem most to crave. Winning the War for Talent, therefore, is simply a matter of filling open positions with those who have such skills. The faster and cheaper that's done, the greater our victory.

Or is it? What happens when we fill an opening with a mediocre programmer, scientist or engineer? Or worse, a substandard one? Have we won the war or simply filled a req?

If the goal of our recruiting is to position our employer or client to achieve its mission, then we have won a battle, but lost the War. We have, in effect, done only half our job. We may have completed an assignment, but we have not contributed as we must. We have acquired skills, but not the talent that is essential to an organization's success.

Talent, you see, is much more than even the hardest to find skill. Talent is the capacity for excellence. The good news is that every human being has it. As I explain in my book, *The Career Activist Republic*, it is a characteristic of our species. It is a gift with which we have all been endowed. The bad news is that many people don't bring their talent to work with them. And, it's that human shortcoming which creates the War for Talent.

The shortage of excellence would be bad enough, but the hyper competition of today's global marketplace exacerbates its impact. There are now "A" level Python programmers, clinical scientists and mechanical engineers working in China and India, Brazil and Germany. To survive and have even a chance to prosper, therefore, employers don't need those with rare skills, they need those with the rare commitment to superior performance in every skill.

How do you identify such talented candidates?

Here are some telltale signs. They aren't foolproof or all inclusive, but they will give you a sense of what to look for:

Talented candidates move around. They shift continuously from assignment-to-assignment within their current employer or from one employer to another. They have what might best be described as a "three year itch." Every three years or so, they feel compelled to find a new challenge to conquer in their field.

Talented candidates are renaissance students. They see themselves as multidimensional contributors rather than as experts in a single function. For that reason, they devote themselves to

professional development not only in their primary field of work, but in ancillary areas that will enable them to express their talent in a wider range of work situations.

Talented candidates seek advancement by testing rather than by pay grade. They are constantly striving to express and experience more of their talent, more of their capacity for excellence. When they interview, therefore, they are less interested in the opportunities for upward mobility and more interested in what new challenges they will get to face on-the-job.

The only way to win the War for Talent is have a clear understanding of what victory we are trying to achieve. Our goal is not simply to fill openings with those who have rare skills. Our goal must be to ensure that our employer or client succeeds. And the only way to accomplish that objective is to recruit rare performers in as many skill categories as possible. For in the end, what matters most is not if we win the War for Talent, but if our organization does.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

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Peter Weddle is the author of over two dozen employment-related books, including the recently released blockbuster *The Career Activist Republic* and *Work Strong, Your Personal Career Fitness System*, one of the most innovative career success books in print. Both are available at Amazon.com.

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