Finding the Right Person for the Job

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Finding the right person for the job is hard, really hard. One day I met Tyler and had this conversation with him, and afterwards I left our time together, wondering when someone would agree he was the right person for their job.

I met Tyler, while reading the paper and enjoying an expresso at my favorite coffee shop. I was waiting for my wife while she was shopping near by. Tyler sat nearby looking at his laptop. I noticed he had looked at me a few times before venturing forth with a question. He asked me what I did for a living, and I shared a few details. I asking about him and he told me he had recently graduated from a local university with a major in business; that he was here today at the coffee shop looking at various job boards because he wanted to get a job.

He continued by saying he wasn’t sure what he could do in the business world, but if someone gave him a chance, he was confident he could do whatever it was they needed.

I replied that given his case, that is that he didn’t know what he could do, deciding on which job posting to respond to would appear to be a conflicted process. He shared some general thoughts he had about the kinds of jobs he might like, such as providing some service or doing analytic work. After some other chit chat, I told him I was in a position at my job to hire people from time to time for entry level positions, and would he like to have me conduct a mock interview as if he were a job candidate. Tyler tentatively agreed.

To better prepare him for the mock interview, I verbally gave him a brief job description. I began with: “The job title was data analyst 1, and that our company had three levels of data analyst based on experience and skills. As a data analyst 1, your day would consist mainly of sitting in a cubicle, surrounded by 10 data analysts seated in other cubicles, with a computer that had two monitors. Each day you would come to work at 8am, take a 10 minute break at 10am, followed by a one hour lunch break at 12. Take another 10 minute break at 3pm, and then at 5pm leave the office. You would do this for 51 weeks a year and have one week off for vacation.

“During this time in your cubicle you would work primarily on your computer, but periodically you would meet with other data analysts in teams for the purpose of addressing certain problems. The work you would do on this computer would include the following:

- Each day you would produce a series of reports, using Excel, required by the accounting department. These reports would require the collation of various data sets found in 5 different databases.
- With these reports you would generate several different charts or graphs and tables.
- Additionally, you would create a Microsoft PPT slide presentation consistency of no less than 10 slides comprised of a summation of the final set of data and charts, graphs, and tables.
• You would need to deliver this information to the accounting office by 11:30am each day.
• In addition, each day you would use Microsoft Outlook to receive and send emails to other data analysts, locally based staff, and staff in three other states. From time to time you would respond to customer emails.
• Your office phone would be used for internal company calls, but from time to time, based on his position on the office phone response tree, you might take all external incoming calls. To that end, you would need to know how to receive and transfer calls.
• When needed you could be required to manage the presentation technology used in the conference room. This would include all audio and video component connectivity.
• On a weekly basis you would be required to monitor a series of customer activity reports. This reports show how much time the customer is spending in various compartments of the software.
• Monthly you will provide a report which summarizes the current and trended customer usage by compartment.
• Over the course of your first 60 days of employment you will be trained on how to use the software we produce for our customer’s use.
• When fully trained you are expected to have the ability to navigate the system sufficiently enough to provide basic training and Q & A support for customers if needed.
• On an as-need-basis you will be asked to evaluate updated versions of the software. Your task will be to work the software with the intent of finding any bugs, then logging those bugs in a report to the programmers."

“Tyler,” I said, “any questions?”

Tyler, looking a bit dazed, said, “I guess not.”

I followed with, “You sure?”

Tyler grunted, “I think so.”

“Okay Tyler, let’s begin,” I said.

I decided I didn’t want to spend too much time with this mock interview because I didn’t know how long my wife would be, so chose to ask a couple of questions that were intended to get right to the point. That is, the point of learning perhaps some make or break characteristics of Tyler’s skills and personality.

So I started with, “Tyler, tell me about an instance where you taught yourself something without the aide of others or youtube?”

Tyler without hesitation began by saying, “I enjoy music but I didn’t play an instrument. As it turned out, my uncle had offered to give me his old drum set, so I decided to teach myself how to play drums. While I listened to music I had never paid much attention to the drums. But what the heck, I’d give it a try. I decided to see what would happen if I tried playing without listening to the drums on records or watch any videos. I would just do what I could hear in my head and feel naturally. At first I was very awkward and as I tried different ways of finding a beat, I could not keep a steady rhythm or pattern. I had no coordination. Slowly with time and practice I got better. I made myself practice for an hour at least four times a week. They say great drummers have four way independence, which means each hand and foot moves in whatever pattern
drummer wants without regards to the other three limbs. At best I had two way independence for a long time. I stuck with it and created a method where I would be persistent with a certain rhythm with say my two feet or my left hand and right foot, where each limb had to the opposite of the other. In time that worked, and it took about a year for me to become pretty proficient with four way independence. It's been three years now, and on weekends I play drums in our church worship team.' With that he finished with a sigh and a smile.

I said to Tyler, “I'm impressed with your approach to solving the problems associated with learning something new like a musical instrument.”

“Tyler, next we'll role play. The situation is a phone call so turn around in your chair and you will pretend to be on the phone with me.”

I said, “Ring, ring.”

Tyler pretended to put a phone to his ear and said, “Hello.”

I began in a stern voice, “Hello this is Gregory L. Hutzell, in the accounting department in Memphis, and I want to know why this report is wrong?”

Tyler paused a bit too long before saying, “Well Bill, I don’t know what you’re talking about, but I’m curious what you found. Can you explain what you see?”

In Bill’s stern voice, I said, “It appears your formulas are wrong because when I manually add up columns A, B, G, and T, I get a different sum. This is a PDF, so I can’t see your formulas. You need to fix this.”

Tyler, now with more confidence said, “I'm sorry you have the PDF, and you can't see my work, but I think you may have the wrong version. Perhaps somehow the wrong one was sent, because even though I could have made a mistake, I usually check my work several times before I send it out. Please give me our email address and phone number and I'll look into it and follow up by the end of day. Is that okay.”

As Bill, I said, “Sure and hung up.” Tyler pretended to do the same.

Moving on to the third, and I expected to be the last question, I asked, “Tyler, tell me something you do well and are proud of, and you believe helps qualify you for this job as it has been described?”

Tyler finally smiled and seems to relax. “Well,” he said, “I see the big picture. I’m not sure how I do it, but give me a bunch of parts or a problem with different things, and I can pretty quickly know what it will be when assembled. It’s true of a lot of things. Like once my brother got a plastic model with all the parts in a plastic bag but without any picture or instructions for a present. Maybe the person bought it at a garage sale. My brother had no clue what it was, so he gave it to me to assemble. There must have been 100 gray parts. I figured it out on my own and it turned out to be a battleship. I knew that if there was a problem to solve, I could solve it. I found that was true in algebra class, physics, and even a summer robotics camp I attended.”
“Tyler,” I said, “I thought that would be my last question in our mock job interview, but your last answer intrigues, so here is one more. If together we could watch a video taken while you attended a big party in a large hotel ballroom where you didn’t know anyone, what would we observe about your behavior at the party?”

Tyler looked to the floor then to the side, avoiding my eye contact. He swallowed hard, then said, “well you’d see someone who didn’t look comfortable. I don’t drink, but I’d be walking around with a glass of ice water. I’d tend to stay on the perimeter, but finally I’d find a table to sit at and I would start talking to someone close by, assuming they weren’t talking to anyone; and you would see me sitting in that same seat talking to the same person until I felt it was okay to leave. But what you wouldn’t be able to see, is that my conversation with the person was really interesting, because I learned about what they did for a living and I asked lots of questions which they seemed to enjoy answering. That’s the way I am. Put me in a crowd and I’ll shrink. Put me one on one and I’ll shine.”

If given the Myers-Briggs Indicator assessment, I suspect Tyler would be classified as a INTP. Similarly with the Big Five Model, he would probably show pretty well on dimensions which together indicate the likelihood for high job performance, including careful, thorough, able to plan, organized, hardworking, persistent, and achievement-oriented. Lastly, of the thirty-four themes of StrengthsFinder, his signature themes would include, analytical, individualization, context, and ideation.

It also occurs to me as to determining the best questions to ask candidates, that it may be more art than science. My take away from my mock interview with Tyler, is potential job candidates may not often get asked the right questions. That the questions their asked may cause the candidate to respond or mask their true nature. I think Tyler has a lot to offer, and my questions were broad enough to let him take the path that best suited his experiences, but traditional job interview questions may not have allowed him to reveal his very capable side.

Just shortly after Tyler finished his last reply I saw my wife walk by the coffee shop on the way to our car, so I had to leave. We departed with a firm handshake. But before I left I encouraged him to be persistent and assertive in his job seeking efforts, because based on our mock interview, I found he had a lot going for himself, and would make some firm a fine employee. He thanked me and off I went to meet my wife.