How Candidates Make Decisions

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Life is a series of choices. In any given day, individuals make hundreds of them. Some choices are simple and can be made on an instinctive level, while others require careful consideration. However, all choices have one thing in common. They require a decision and understanding how individuals make their decisions provides a clue to predicting their behavior.

Remember

With most adults, the process of decision-making reflects a well-established pattern. This pattern may contain both positive and negative aspects. Nevertheless, this decision making process tends to serve as the foundation for most of their adult behaviors.

Therefore, identifying and understanding this process should be an essential component of your assessment process with both candidates and recruits. After all, the decisions they make will have a far reaching impact on the rest of their lives and those decisions will be influenced by three primary emotions.

1. The fear of change.

2. Uncertainty about the future.

3. Doubt regarding their decision.

You can better understand how these emotions influence their decisions by asking certain questions during your assessment process. The key is to look for patterns in "how" they make their decisions.

When reviewing each of their previous positions, in addition to your normal behaviorally based questions, make certain to ask the following:

How did you find this job?

Follow-up questions:

What were your primary motivations for beginning your job search?

How long was your job search?

What resources did you utilize in conducting your job search?

Which of these resources were of greatest value? Why is that?

In addition to this position, what other companies and positions did you pursue? What were the results?

The purpose for these questions is to gain an understanding of the process the individual uses in making a job change. The odds are pretty good that the resources they found to be of most value in the past will be resources they will use again in the future. This is particularly true if they have formed a strong bond with another recruiter or referral source with which they have maintained an on-going relationship.

Furthermore, the answers to these questions will provide a strong indication as to whether the individual takes a passive role in managing their career (waits for things to happen) or a more active role (makes things happen according to plan). The difference between these two approaches is substantial, particularly as it relates to the three primary emotions outlined above.

Remember

In the short-term, the path of least resistance generally contains far less emotional pressure than a course of action that takes into consideration long-term consequences.

The next series of questions is designed to help you better understand the specific factors that went into their decision to accept a position and to subsequently leave it. Many times the answers to these questions provide a more in-depth look at how their motivations are balanced against their emotions when making a decision. Ask these questions for each of the positions the individual has held, including their present one.

What attracted you to this position?

Follow-up questions:

What were the primary reasons you accepted this position? (Probe with further questions seeking specific examples)

Were these reasons validated after you were on the job? (Probe for specific examples)

If not, why not? (Probe for specific examples)

What were you motivations for seeking a new position? (If not already answered by the above questions)

Did you establish specific criteria that needed to be met before you accepted this position?

If so, what were they and how did this position meet those criteria?

The answers to these questions will provide a fairly clear indication on how they make their decisions. Logically, measuring each variable against predetermined objective criteria, or emotionally, sparked by the stimulus of the moment. The best decisions tend to have a proper balance of both logic and emotion.

Most people, when confronted with making a major decision, seek the advice of a trusted confidant. This could be any or all of the following: a spouse, family member, close friend, associate at work, or in some instances, even their boss *(See my article – "Beware of the Boss")*. Consequently, it is important to ask questions regarding this important dimension of their decision making process. Examples include:

Whom do you confide in when making major decisions of this nature?

Follow-up questions include:

At what point do you bring them into your decision making process?

What specific advice would (did) they give you?

How much weight did (do) you place on their advice?

How do you handle it when their advice runs contrary to what you want to do?

How frequently does this happen?

Should we be including them in our discussions at this time?

If not, why not?

If so, set up a time for the discussion and establish the agenda.

The purpose for this line of questioning is to determine the credibility of the confidant, the amount of influence they may have on the decision making process, and to position yourself to work with them if and when it becomes necessary.

Keep in mind that whether right or wrong, whether logical or emotional, whether or not they confide in others, adults tend to follow an established process when making their decisions. Understanding "how" they use that process to arrive at their decisions is crucial to establishing yourself as a critical element of that process. It is only through this positioning that you can accomplish your primary objective; insuring your candidate or recruit makes the best decision for them, a decision that is right for both the short term and the long run.

Meanwhile, if you have questions or comments about this article or wish to receive my input on any other topic related to your business, just let me know. Your calls and e-mails are most welcome.

Terry Petra is available for one-on-one coaching, consulting and group training through **"Petra On Call"**, a cost effective approach to receiving the full benefit of his expertise. For details on Terry's products and services, including **"Business Appraisals"**, visit his web site at: www.tpetra.com. Terry can be reached at (651) 738-8561 or e-mail him at: Terry@tpetra.com.