

3 reasons to hire for potential over experience in the war for talent

By [Karien Spencer](#)

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Globally, employers are arming themselves for war. But this war is not taking place on a battlefield or in the trenches - it's taking place in the boardroom. The critical scarcity of skills, in the era of 'the Great Resignation', has resulted in a battle for talent that has never been seen before.



Karien Spencer, Talent Acquisition Lead at Decision Inc.

Working in a highly competitive industry, suitable resources are not only scarce, but we are also witnessing their reluctance to openly engage with recruiters around employment opportunities.

At Decision Inc., we have found that time and time again, our best performers are often recruited from our Talent Lab (graduate programme). But, as an alternative, we have started encouraging our managers to hire 'for potential'.

Potential vs experience

Traditionally, employers made hiring decisions based almost exclusively on competence; breaking down a role into a laundry list of mandatory skills and seeking candidates whose experience matches their wish list of ideal traits. Lauren Smith, VP at Gartner affirms this:

“Hiring managers have typically focused on candidate profiles, recycling the most recent job description and just adding new desired skills to the list.”

However, the work landscape is changing rapidly. While the need for scarce skills continues to challenge companies, finding candidates who are a good “culture fit” is an increasingly important component of the hiring process. This means that it's becoming more difficult for companies to find employees who fit the blueprint - and, more importantly, are actually seeking a career move.

So, how can your business overcome these modern hiring hurdles to build a workforce that isn't just aligned with your current needs, but can scale and adapt to achieve your future goals as well?

We have an idea: hire for potential, not experience.



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Why potential, not experience?

Do you find yourself wavering between hiring according to experience or potential?

There are numerous pros and cons to hiring experienced vs inexperienced employees, and your decision will depend on a variety of factors, such as budget and/or capacity gaps.

To help you make the right decision, here are three questions to ask when considering hiring someone without the required experience but who shows plenty of potential:

1. Are you limiting your candidate pool and overlooking the best fit?

When you reject candidates simply because they don't fit the skill and experience parameters you've initially set for an open position, you could be missing out on the perfect candidate.

Let's say a candidate applies for a position requiring three years' experience. The candidate has only been in their job for eight months, so you disqualify them without further consideration.

Yet, had you looked further, you may have found that they check every other box, are passionate and excited about your company and would have been a perfect culture fit. While there are no guarantees, a phone screening or initial interview might have yielded results. Never discount the effort you've put into drafting your job requirements but be open to considering the candidate holistically.

While traditionally recruiters have focussed primarily on experience and certifications, Gartner research shows,

“ that 43% of candidates today are self-taught in one or more of their role's requirements. ”

This means that while they may not have the traditional experience or certification hirers have previously looked for, on the job they may be as competent as or even more so than a traditional hire.



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2. Does experience equal performance?

You may assume that if a candidate was able to accomplish “XYZ” somewhere else, they can just as easily do it for your company too. However, this isn’t necessarily true, as prior experience doesn’t always guarantee a certain level of performance.

It’s easy for an employee to become stagnant and stuck in a rut after doing the same job or working in the same industry for a long period. While they may have years and years of experience, those could be years without any truly significant change, results, or personal growth.

One of the major benefits of hiring someone with limited or even no previous experience in the role is that they have a fresh perspective and tend to be more willing to ask questions and challenge the status quo. Higher motivation, passion, and curiosity can make all the difference.

Making a new hire isn’t just about whether they have the right skills to fill your needs right now — it’s also whether they’re willing and able to keep learning new ones. This will push your business to grow and keep providing better value for customers.

3. Hard skills can be taught ... what about attitude?

You’ve seen it before: a candidate who seems to be the perfect fit and ticks every box on your skills and experience wishlist, comes into your workplace and interacts with the team, and the chemistry is off.

Why is this such a big problem? It’s certainly possible to teach an employee new hard skills — such as how to use your software, send a professional email, or deliver a presentation to a client. However, trying to teach someone some of the softer skills, that requires a level of emotional intelligence isn’t quite so simple. If an employee’s personality quirks don’t align with your culture code or mesh well with the current team, this creates hidden costs that can affect the whole staff.

If the motivation isn’t there for an employee to succeed in your company and they aren’t a good culture fit, it doesn’t matter if they have 30 years or 30 minutes of experience under their belt.

Embracing less experienced but highly motivated employees with the potential to do great things may well be worth the risk.

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