

“Overqualified” is a nonsense term

Don't miss out on good talent by seeing them as overqualified.

By Dr M Amr Sadik

Despite all that is known about the importance of developing people as a source of competitive advantage, and regardless of the investment dedicated to systems and processes that support people management, an astonishing number of companies still struggle to fill key positions, which puts a considerable constraint on their potential to grow.

Moreover, there are many trends and issues that have evolved within HR, some of which have been addressed and solved, but one trend is still going on and remains mysteriously unsolved. Many round-table discussions are conducted and numerous articles are being published and the issue of shortage of talent is still addressed extensively in HR conferences.

CEOs are saying that they are unable to find the right candidates to fill those critical positions that have been vacant for more than half a year and in some cases for a year. I knew of a CEO who has been looking for an Executive Secretary for almost two years and hasn't found the right person. Can you believe that?

Failure to find what you are looking for is an ongoing source of pain for many contemporary organisations. Organisations are in great danger and vulnerable if they can't find those elite people and someone has to pay the bills. Eventually, HR will be blamed for not getting the people on board as planned, and hiring becomes a critical mission for both companies and recruitment agencies.

Blind side

Why are companies who invest thousands of dollars in recruitment activities so often unable to find what they are looking for or, as they say, find the talented ones?

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Perceptions about a lack of talent are pervasive, but this is an illusion. As a matter of fact, it is short sightedness on the part of the recruiting, hiring function and/or top management, and unsubstantiated and quite irritating for many applicants. It is a myth or fairy tale.

Since 1997, when McKinsey & Company invented the term “War for Talent” companies have been going nuts and entering the war to find talent and get it on board. It became one of the most important new buzzwords in Corporate HR. Moreover, there are some companies which went as far as introducing a function within HR called Talent Management, and we are really wondering what they do and what that is supposed to mean in business terms.

The first impression I get from the term “Talent Management” is that of an impresario who is in charge of managing events and can get you good singers and dancers for your daughter's wedding.

However, despite its growing popularity, the concept of Talent remains unclear and a definition of talent is deceptively misleading. The sad part of the story is that talent was never explicitly defined in “The War for Talent” report, and companies do not know how to define nor manage it and, if defined, it is a vague, meaningless or very broad statement. Unfortunately we do not think things through and instead we just take things for granted or react blindly.

Furthermore, how many times have good people been rejected for the “nonsense” reason of being “overqualified”? Hiring decision makers or head hunters at organisational level wrongly assume that candidates are too qualified to suit the job. Their excuse and assumption is that the candidate may

Essentially you're telling this person: “You meet all the qualifications of the position above and beyond, but we're not hiring you based on that.” **Logically it doesn't make sense.**

ask for a high package or will probably be bored or feel under utilised and therefore will not last for long.

The main reason is that organisations don't want to pay for those highly educated and experienced personnel or they underestimate their capabilities. Instead, they penalise their organisations by hiring less costly candidates and later regret it.

In early 2013, I was assisting a food manufacturing company to find and hire a strong supply chain director as they want to get rid of the current underperforming one and, after reviewing some good resumes, we decided to interview two candidates one of which was a group supply chain director for a very respectable, large and well known company.

However, the CEO stated that the candidate didn't look aggressive enough and rejected him. I then

proposed a new candidate whom I personally knew, with the following credentials:

- 15 years of experience with major international companies;
- Implemented Lean Manufacturing Principles and change management initiatives credited with improving corporate production processes and increasing corporate revenue;
- Master of International Business Administration in Global Management, ESLSCA Business School, Paris, France;
- Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Power Engineering;
- Certified Supply Chain Professional;
- Qualified Supply Chain Operations Reference Instructor;
- Certified Supply Chain Operations Reference Professional; and
- Certified Lean Manufacturing Black Belt.

For such qualifications and experience, the CEO offered a monthly salary of between US\$3,500 – US\$4,000 maximum, while the candidate was asking for US\$10,000. The salary for this position in the country ranged between a minimum of \$3,500 for entry managerial post up to a maximum of \$15,000 for director level. The candidate refused further discussion.

If we accept that the universal war for talent is a false perception, then those overqualified individuals are exactly the kind of people organisations should be looking for and hiring, and there are some compelling reasons for this. But first ask yourself: have you ever heard of a low ranking officer appointed as a Defence Minister or officers with no appropriate credentials leading soldiers and troops in a war? Yes, may be in the world of Disney.

Educational perspectives

Overqualified candidates have great intelligence. They have invested serious money, effort and time to gain those credentials to distinguish themselves from others. They have solved several case studies and read numerous books. These candidates are full of knowledge, information and ideas ready to be utilised and implemented. With their qualifications, they are ready to produce insights and improve working practices. But, you don't want hire them!

Experience perspectives

Over and above, the experience they have gained

over years, the challenges they have solved over a period of time are of great interest and probably match what you are currently facing or what you may face in future. They bring wisdom, new perspectives and facts to the discussion table. They have no time

The conventional wisdom is that **knowledge gained from experience is priceless.**

to waste in chit chatting in meetings. But again, you don't want to hire them!

Motivational perspectives

They are definitely motivated and want to demonstrate their worth, and that is the reason why they are applying for the job. Most of them have done their homework and done research on your company before applying. Once more, you don't want to hire them!

Way forward

I firmly believe that the real culprits of not finding what you are looking for are the employers themselves. Organisations, executive search

companies and hiring decision makers have to challenge the *status quo* and the way they think about candidates. If a candidate is missing some of the skills required to do the job, simply invest and offer them a training programme.

I have a friend Mr N.A. who was working as the VP: Finance in a conglomerate company who decided to accept a position of Head of Internal Auditing in an oil and gas company. After a series of interviews, he was selected despite the fact that he had no idea of oil and gas firms and their auditing issues, but he is well educated and experienced. His brave and visionary chairman sponsored him to attend three programmes over a period of six months to get well acquainted and certified in the area.

Pursuing the above option will ultimately expand the supply of employees and increase retention on the job.

Finally, having a lot of education doesn't over-qualify a candidate, nor does experience. If we are not challenging the *status quo* and the way of thinking about candidates, organisations will keep suffering and missing those talented and "overqualified" candidates. Or, as Albert Einstein once said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." ■

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Bring CREATIVITY into your life

You determine just how creative you will be.

By **John Kehoe**

A study conducted many years ago had a profound impact on me. The researchers asked a number of seven-year-olds if they considered themselves creative. Ninety-five percent answered that they did. They then asked a number of adults in their early to mid twenties the same question. Only seven percent replied that they thought they were creative. How did the percentage drop from ninety-five percent to seven? What happens to us as adults to change our perspective of ourselves? And what impact does it have on us when we think of ourselves as 'not creative'? It must limit us, and that is unacceptable, especially since it is an illusion. We are all creative. We don't lose creativity, just as we don't forget how to ride a bike.

Another study shines further light on the creativity issue. A major manufacturing corporation wanted to increase the effectiveness of its engineers, designers and programmers, finding out why some of these people were creative and others were not. What made someone creative, management wondered? They hired a consulting firm which did a three-month study at the company and came up with a surprising finding. It had nothing to do with talent or work ethic or having good ideas. It turned out to be something much more fundamental. What the firm found was that those who were creative thought of themselves as creative. Those who were not, thought of themselves as not creative. It was that simple.

How we view ourselves affects how we work and play and make choices in our life. So it seems quite obvious that if we want to bring creativity into our lives we better start thinking of ourselves as creative people. We are all creative; it's just that many of us have never thought of ourselves in that way. Let's change that.

Here are a few suggestions on how to initiate this:

1. Let's think creatively. Let's choose to believe that we are creative individuals who can change and alter our lives in positive ways. Let's affirm to ourselves every day, "I am a creative person and I act on my creativity." Let's make an acknowledging list of all our creative aspects, starting with the fact that we have an imagination whose function is to be creative. If we haven't been using it, let's start using it. Personally get involved in changing your image of yourself so you begin thinking of yourself as creative.

2. Come up with ideas and ways of making your life more fun and enjoyable, of changing your routines. Can't be done? Too busy? No time or money? That's not being very creative. Remember you're a creative person. Creative people come up with ideas. That's what they do, and since you're a creative person you can too. Linus Pauling, a Nobel Prize winner, said, "The best way to come up with a good idea is to come up with lots of ideas." Let's come up with lots of ideas on how we can make creative changes in our lives. We don't have to act on all of them, but some are sure to be interesting and doable.

3. Make one of them happen. Take one of your ideas and bring it to your life. It is important to act upon your ideas and not keep them as just ideas. When you act upon an idea, it is proof that you are creative, and this builds upon itself. When you fail to act and remain stuck in your habits, you are affirming your lack of creativity. If you want to be creative then act creatively.

Bring creativity into your life by believing in yourself and calling forth your creativity from within. ■

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