

What Employers Hire

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Over the past 5 years or so, I have been asked to share my expertise in hiring practices with seasoned quality assurance, regulatory affairs, and clinical research professionals, as well

as with university students.

Whether audience members are seeking their first position right after graduate school or looking for a career change because of mergers, reorganizations, burnout, or boredom, they all want to discover what they believe are the “secrets” to securing that sometimes-elusive career opportunity.

Far from being a mystery or a closely guarded secret, hiring

the top performer is fairly straightforward, but the reason why most technically oriented professionals come to believe that hiring practices are mysterious is that they do not realize that employers effectively “rent” or “lease” behavior when hiring an individual.

To understand the employer’s rationale, one must remember that **behavior** is defined by *Webster’s New World Dictionary* as **characteristic actions or responses**. Seasoned professionals who hold technical positions usually have an enormous impact on the corporate and team culture, and therefore their characteristic actions and responses to situations and issues are critical components of the hiring decision.

Management’s first task is to determine the behaviors that will most closely suit the

company culture. The hiring authority must then identify and hire the individual who best exhibits, demonstrates, and exemplifies those behaviors so that the mission of the company can be executed smoothly. This is why companies do not hire by simply reading resumes, verifying degrees, and basing hiring decisions on technical and educational proficiencies alone.

As a technical recruiter for the pharmaceutical and medical device industries, placing clinical research, quality assurance, and regulatory affairs professionals, I am expected to submit at least three technically qualified individuals for each position. Put another way, any one of the three candidates can perform all the duties required of the position. But, in reality, only one person gets the position, because hiring authorities will conduct in-person interviews to “hone in” on behaviors and attitudes that will further their team and corporate goals.

To identify the **top performer** for a given position, the hiring authority’s task is to determine the following about all candidates:

- What **motivates** them?
- How do they **think**?
- How do they **act**?
- How do they **interact** with others?

Motivational, thinking, acting, and interacting behaviors are not necessarily the same for technical contributors as they are for technical managers. In this article, we examine the **characteristic actions and responses** a regional manager might describe as behaviors and traits of top performers among clinical research associates.

Motivation

Motivation, described as behavioral traits that address the fundamental “drive” of an



individual, usually goes beyond the CRA's simple desire to earn more money. For many CRAs, the motivation is **mission of service**. This motivation is a strong desire to be on the leading edge of science and research and through their everyday monitoring work help their company bring newer, improved medicines to the world. Individuals who are so motivated exhibit loyalty to their company and their profession, possess a service orientation, exhibit team-player responses to situations, and have a strong commitment to family and community.

Modes of Thinking

Modes of thinking describe behavioral responses and traits that address a person's capacity to gather information and process it. Characteristic actions and responses for a top-performing CRA include the ability to problem-solve issues at sites, sort out essential from nonessential tasks when under a deadline, analyze situations that come up on a daily basis, and devise alternatives or solutions. In addition, CRAs who possess a strong set of ethical principles, along with creativity, flexibility, and adaptability in their work habits, let the hiring manager know that he or she has discovered a CRA who, by his or her discernment and innovative value-based behavior, proves that he or she can function well with autonomy from a home-based office. In short, top-performing CRAs can be trusted with the company's future—their billion dollar investment—their clinical studies.

Modes of Acting

Modes of acting are the characteristic actions and responses that speak to the individual's skill in carrying out the work function. What an employer values in a CRA is organizational and time management skills, considering that CRAs can have as many as 20 protocols and 40 sites to manage at any

given moment. Can the CRA plan and prioritize work so that sites are seen on schedule and weekly reports are on the manager's desk on the date specified? Seeking out new sites, helping to find new CRAs, mentoring them, and volunteering on committees all show initiative, a trait highly valued by overworked, overcommitted managers. Add in physical and mental stamina to keep up with the often-punishing travel schedule, while never losing the ability to focus on monitoring tasks, and the result is a CRA who is a strategist, cultivator, and proactive prospector—traits that will allow that individual to rise to the top in this highly competitive field.

Modes of Interacting

All behaviors presented thus far are crucial to a top-performing CRA's portfolio. However, CRAs who exhibit behaviors and responses that speak to strong interpersonal skills illustrate the difference between those who are merely tolerated by their peers, sites, and managers, and those who are respected as true professionals. It has been said a CRA has to be part policeman, part diplomat, and part detective; however, those who use their skills of persuasion to influence and get "buy-in" from the PIs and CRCs, and who are always in control of the situation regardless of the long hours, the chaos, or the resistance they encounter, will rarely



be confronted with hostility. If they do encounter a hostile response, they will overcome it quickly, making everyone's experience more pleasant.

Summary

Overall, job candidates should expect employers to evaluate job-related competencies or the underlying skills and behaviors that a candidate employs in any situation. For every job in clinical research or in any field, the critical dimensions of job-related competencies are **talents and traits, experience, and chemistry**. Experience (technical competence), which is made up of job-related background, education, and training, and is often viewed as the most important dimension, is actually the *least* critical to success. In my 16 years of search work, there have been numerous occasions when the most technically competent candidate was discarded in favor of a candidate who had less experience but with whom everyone on the interviewing team could be comfortable in terms of personality, chemistry, and attitude, confirming the initial premise that companies rent or lease behaviors.

For this reason, candidates are asked to close each interview with these two questions for the interviewer: "Do you (the interviewer) have any concerns about my representing your company?" and "In your opinion, do I have what it takes to be a good fit for your team?" Although these are good closing questions for anyone in any interview situation, it is easy to see how they would be particularly important for CRAs, because they have to do with the perception the interviewer has of the behaviors or traits he or she is seeking in a candidate.

Interviewees who know themselves are clear about what they have to offer and can give an unambiguous snapshot of their character-

istic behaviors and traits; they will have the inside track to gaining whatever position they seek because the process is no longer a mystery or a secret.

A Good Resume

In a future article, we will focus on how a good resume reflects a candidate's motivations, thinking, acting, and interacting behaviors—how that kind of "door opener" can get a hiring authority to drop everything, pick up the phone, and set up an in-person interview. ■

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