

All you need to know about screening 'scrapper' candidates

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As the human resources manager for UPS, Regina Hartley has had more than 20 years' experience in employee relations, organizational communication and talent acquisition. Her November 2015 raised some interesting questions about "the scrapper."

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What is that, you ask? A scrapper is a candidate who has done some job hopping, but has clearly overcome adversity and fought against the odds to become qualified for the prospective role.

Contrast the scrapper with another kind of qualified candidate: "the silver spoon," who has the perfect resume and clearly was destined for success given all his or her advantages.

So considering that both candidates are qualified for the job, which person is the better hire? Does it make more sense to go for the perfect resume?

While a scrapper's series of job-hopping may look like a lack of focus and inconsistency, as Hartley noted, all that job-hopping may also mean that this individual was in a struggle against obstacles to get where he or she is today. It may be worth your time to at least evaluate this scrapper a little further.

After all, that supposed struggle may have offered the scrapper essential soft skills. The National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE), for instance, found that most employers surveyed could list specific skills they considered critical to a candidate's career readiness.

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Topping the list were critical thinking and problem-solving, professionalism and work ethic, teamwork and communication skills.

And, going back to the scrapper, overcoming adversity requires a lot of those soft skills: problem-solving, work ethic and critical thinking, in particular. So, why not give that scrapper a fair shot?

Here's how to fairly evaluate your own scrapper candidate to ensure that your hiring team makes that best hire:

Ask for referrals.

Before diving into assessing a scrapper, make sure your hiring team is attracting a diverse group of qualified candidates. An employee referral program is the perfect tool for finding top talent. The 2015 survey from ICIMS found that more than half of the 107 HR professionals surveyed agreed that referred employees stay longer, feel more satisfaction and are better cultural fits.

Typically, referred candidates are better than external ones because the employees sending them your way already know the culture. They make referrals based not just on role competency, but also on cultural fit. So all qualified, referred job-seekers should be evaluated, even if they don't have the "perfect resume."

To train employees on how to make strong referrals, keep them up to date on talent needs. They should know when a job will post and what the job entails. Share descriptions with them and define the ideal candidate.

Hold meetings to discuss the program and keep employees informed about their referrals and the incentives. If a specific employee's referral advances to the interview stage, let that person know. The secret to keeping staffers engaged in the referral program is openly communicating and offering rewards to motivate them.

Look for growth.

When assessing applicants, look for those who have a growth mindset. This will be especially prominent among those who are scrappers.

Consider their journey -- how they overcame adversity to get where they are today, what past experiences shaped them and how they maneuvered the job-seeker landscape to land in your resume pile. Their ability to evolve has a lot of value in the workplace.

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Post-traumatic growth is transformative. It's defined as the positive psychological change people undergo after a major challenge that leads them to a higher level of functioning. Scrappers know this all too well, and that understanding reflects their ability to cultivate a growth mindset and focus on personal development.

They are lifelong learners. They see themselves not as being fixed, but in a constant state of evolution, where they can develop new skills. Instead of avoiding change or cowering in fear, they channel their passion and sense of purpose to engage in constructive activities and continue to push forward.

These skills are critical when employers want employees ready to take on responsibilities and willing to learn and grow. These employees are easily retained when companies offer advancement opportunities.

Conduct a panel interview.

The interview is the perfect time to emphasize how much your company values employee development. Focus the discussion on how candidates want to fit in with the company's vision.

It's also wise to involve current employees in the interview process to provide different perspectives. Panel interviews are great because multiple perspectives will come together for an in-depth look at all candidates.

Ask important questions, especially about candidates' pasts. Request real-life examples of how they face challenges, how they react to failure, and what they do to overcome drastic changes.

Compare the answers you receive from the silver spoon and the scrapper applicants to see each of their approaches. The scrappers will have several instances to share. Follow-up to learn more about these individuals' tactics for turning challenges into positives. Inquire about what motivates them in order to gauge their level of passion.

Compare candidates to employees.

Evaluate current employees to identify any scrappers already on the team.

Everyone has a different story and background. It's important to identify the scrapper employees and compare them to scrapper candidates.

How do they differ? How are they similar? This helps predict a candidate's potential for success. For example, if a scrapper employee has exceeded expectations and has proven his or her leadership skills, to earn a management position, the scrapper candidate may follow a similar path.

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Do the same with silver spoon employees. Measure their ability to adapt and evolve to succeed, and see which type is better suited for the role you offer and the workplace culture surrounding it.