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Qualities beyond the qualifications

In job interviews, employers seek matching values

By **LINDA M. WIEDMAIER**

If you think unclogging a toilet is beneath your dignity, you probably shouldn't apply for a job at Restoration Hardware in Town Center Plaza.

No, unclogging toilets isn't in the official job description for the store's sales associates. But being flexible enough to describe a cabinet's English dovetail features to a customer after fixing a plumbing problem - all handled in a pleasant and helpful manner - is a definite plus in being considered for employment.

"We don't just stand out front and wait until a customer comes in," said store manager Irene Jones. "We have to do things during the day to prepare so that customers come in and have an enjoyable shopping experience."

Having great people skills and an impressive resume may get you an interview with Jones, but when deciding among applicants of equal stature, she places a value on certain traits. Whether they have the necessary stamina to work retail sales or the ability to deal well with stress, applicants must prove they can do more than be pleasant and informative.

No matter what the job is, it sometimes comes down to possessing special qualities beyond the obvious qualifications that may have you filling out W-4 forms sooner than later.

Gail Murphy, president-owner of Equity Human Resources Inc. in Gladstone, says that all things being equally impressive - education, experience, references - hiring an employee comes down to finding someone with matching values.

Murphy says employers, of course, must first identify their own values and then structure questions that illuminate a prospective employee's values. To glean this information, Murphy recommends structuring questions like a story. For instance, employers can describe scenarios and then ask those being interviewed how they would react in those situations. Or perhaps ask them how they have reacted in former jobs.

For applicants, learning all they can about the company before an interview may help them discover the company's values. Then they can think of ways to illustrate their shared values.

Alex Clark, human resources director for the YMCA of Greater Kansas City, says it's important that employees exemplify the YMCA's four core values - caring, honesty, respect and responsibility.

Clark realizes that when people are being interviewed, they want to emphasize their best qualities and positive work experiences, but being honest about problems in former jobs can bring forth clues about a person's values.

"I'll ask someone to discuss a particular situation in which someone was angry with them and ask

how they resolved that situation," Clark said. " ... I learn from their demeanor if they learned from that situation."

Being a bit defensive demonstrates an applicant may not be willing to take responsibility. Indicating that responsibility was taken for the situation and initiative was shown in resolving the problem can show character.

Showing initiative during an interview is also a valued trait that can help applicants. People being interviewed shouldn't just sit back and answer questions but initiate inquiries, Murphy said. Once applicants determine what special qualities are important to the employer, they can relate anecdotal information about themselves that shows how they possess these traits.

Or an applicant can speak up with definite ideas about a prospective job during the interview. Clark says that after receiving several resumes and then conducting some interviews for a job in the human resources department, it came down to two candidates. Both then were asked to come in and see firsthand the challenges of the job.

"It's a job that is nonstop, never-ending. One candidate said, 'That's a lot of work,' and the other candidate looked at the job and already had ideas on how she could make it easy on herself," Clark said. "We hired that candidate."

Whether you're the employer or prospective employee, Murphy advises people to spend time devising questions that will garner the information they desire.

As Murphy says: "You can't put a value on being prepared."



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