

# When hiring... do you believe in nurture or nature?

In the Walt Disney motion picture Million Dollar Arm, based on a true story, two young Indians, Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel are discovered by a sports agent named J.B Bernstein who wondered, while watching TV passively, what would happen if someone brought a cricket player into Major League Baseball?

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It is common knowledge that a sales organisation will refer to its failures, successes, recruitment, objectives and more in terms of elite sports. Success is not just about acquiring the hard skills, it is about training the soft skills with consistency, testing your will and discipline and learning new hard skills when you've mastered the old ones.

If you are looking to build an A team with A players, you will stumble upon questions like what skills should I be looking to create a solid foundation?

*'How fast do they pitch in cricket? I think I cracked this.'* – JB Bernstein

*'They don't play baseball in India.' – Ash*

*'That's right. They don't. They play cricket. But we think that we can convert a cricket bowler into a baseball pitcher.' – JB Bernstein*

When it comes to assessing soft skills, few will hit the homerun without the four traits below categories:

Intelligence. Do they have the street smarts to make the best use of their time, and the ability to assess urgent vs important to quickly learn about your process, your product and your use cases.

Coachability. This is the most important one in my humble opinion, the one you cannot fix. If someone has too much ego or if they listen but are incapable of applying your advice you cannot help them grow.

Drive. Someone who is training for a marathon has the will to achieve an objective and the discipline to do it. Look for people who consistently push themselves out of their comfort zone, people who don't need others to set them objectives. They are the ones who will not take a quota as a final goal but as a minimum requirement to achieve.

Experience. A resume is only part of the story. Experience can be acquired outside of school and outside of typical career paths. Explore their stories, what did they learn from their mistakes, failures, what would they do differently? Someone who does not learn from experience cannot adapt.

You cannot nurture someone who does not have the nature and true character fitting these soft skills. Mastering these soft skills will enable you to better recruit, allow successful transfers from one department to another in your organisation and allow you to justify promotions.

*'We go over there and find these guys, we bring them back here, we train them in LA. Get them ready in a year' – JB Bernstein*

The hiring situation. Often, the recruitment process is rushed. Indeed, too many things in business are rushed. From making the decision to hire, and reducing onboarding time to expecting instant performance. For Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, trust was essential. Being under pressure as soon as they set foot in America was counterproductive to their performance. In sales, most salespeople are expected to close their first deal within 3 to 6 months, and when they don't, the pressure increases exponentially. My advice is to take more time to make the right choices, then support, back them up and develop them so that they can be the best versions of themselves. Feeling trusted goes a long way.

*'Cricket and baseball are two completely different throwing motions.'*

*'The biomechanics, the timing, the sequencing, it's just not the same at all.'* – Coach House

The transferee situation. Can a Customer Success or a Solution Consultant become an Elite Salesperson? Can someone from a completely different career as a consultant at McKinsey or BCG become an Elite salesperson? In the movie, the environmental setting, the open welcome and appreciation together with the players being given enough time to adjust was essential in the performance of the young Indians. Changing roles requires adaptation. Taking the time to set up a proper transition with mentors and support is essential for a transferee to thrive.

*'Sometimes to win, you have to change the game.'* – J.B Bernstein

The promoted situation. From being a Sales Development Representative to becoming an Account Executive (AE), from being an AE to stepping up in a manager role, soft skills are important and determination is essential. Do not

step into a role unprepared, you must train and seek mentoring, coaching, readings to prepare for your next job , prior to your promotion, acquire the hard skills, before you have to do it, learn and experience, set yourself up for success by avoiding having to have too many skills to learn at once.

Running a skill/will assessment, listing open ended questions such as: How would you describe your strengths in your current role? How will you make a difference in your future role? What would prevent you from being successful in your role/next role. How excited about your day to day job? What is boring you in your current role? ...

Formalising this process in a skill/will matrix, scoring not only the eagerness for the current and next positions as well the hard skills to acquire is a good way to define a career path and development plan whether you are hiring, transferring or promoting a person. This fine balance is often shaken up in the tech startup and scale up world. Take the time to talk about this once a quarter, away from Quarterly business reviews (QBR) and Objectives Key results (OKRs) settings. Setting a clear development path with milestones, allocating people committed to the success of the person, focusing on trust and lowering the pressure to deliver in the first few months will maximise your chances of success.

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