AIA
Practice Management

Human Resources Webinar Questions & Answers Log

Presented 6.28.2012
Presented by Sandy Blaha, President, Sandy Blaha Performance Consulting

---

**Q: What insight do you have regarding assessing TALENT versus assessing POTENTIAL??
Talent speaks for itself, whereas potential often lies latent within prospects.** [Desmond Grimball]

SB: That is an excellent question.   I have a lot of knowledge of various ways to assess talent.

It is a dis-service to not assess your talent pool. Assessment is a great opening to self-awareness and begins the discussion that is often on the minds of professionals…my career potential/pathway.

I do both simultaneously, assess talent and potential.   I start with assessment and understanding of leadership and communication style as well as emotional intelligence.   I would add an interview to the process.   Ask the "candidate" questions just like you would a new hire.   What are they best at, what is their vision of their future, what do they value and how does that vision and value statement mesh with your company's values and vision, what are they committed to achieving in their career?   By doing so you begin to assess passion, drive, energy, urgency, and vision.   You can ask about examples of their ability to persevere. Anyone being considered for development investment needs be able to persevere through the tough times and projects without becoming depressed or disengaged.

I *always* consider potential when assessing talent.   In the AIA workbook I provided (www.sandyblaha.com/AIAresources) I have given you a short list of behaviors that I look for in high potential personnel.

Q: **At the time of hiring how can one identify "high performance" individual?** [Prabhansu Ghoshal]

SB: I recommend the topgrading interview process. You get a little bit of information in the recorded webinar about that. You can call or email me for more information…sandy@sandyblaha.com, 303-260-6480.

I have a few comments however regarding identifying a high performer in an interview. They don't shut down when you ask specific tough questions or dance around the question. They readily provide the names of any person you deem important to talk with in checking references. They have energy and enthusiasm, their eyes light up when they speak of their passion for architecture. They give specific answers about what they've accomplished.

Q: **Based on your comments about a lack of talent, especially in the leadership and operations areas of practice, you seem to overlook the boomers that still have a lot to offer; those that aren't interested in ownership transitions, but are interested in developing others, yet find themselves in a downsized situation. Your thoughts please.** [Richard Stump]

SB: This is another great observation. Of course boomers need to be valued while bringing along your next generation. Finding the right role for the boomer, one that values expertise and years of experience is a good way to go. If a boomer IS interested in developing others bravo! That is a very necessary role and one that is often overlooked and undervalued. I would negotiate a lower billable ratio expectation as it can feel like there is so much work to do I shouldn't stop, slow down and teach, mentor or coach. Not everyone is suited to be a coach so if you have someone that is good at it, sanction and empower that role. There is much more to discuss, call me if you like.

Q: **What is the age range of Generation Y?** [Martin Powell]

SB: Roughly 17-30 years old.

Q: **With the current past four year economy many firms have had layoffs, and with some firms then losing some senior and middle management. Hiring to replace that 15 to 25 year top talent is costly strategically so what is best process to overcome the effects of this type of economy?** [Bill Burmeister]

SB: Hi Bill. This is such a dilemma isn't it? I think you must ask your remaining senior

staff to be more involved than ever in teaching and mentoring.   Use the topgrading process to make sure you hire 'A' employees.   Use the talent assessment and development process to advance your high performers more quickly.   Let me know if your team wants a custom topgrading/talent webinar to give you the full scope of what you can do to address your challenges.

Q: Are boomers discounted in this discussion?   It seems that they are overlooked when commenting about the lack of talent, especially in leadership, coaching/mentoring, and operations.   Is this true? [Richard Stump]

SB: Yes.   There was a lot to cover.   What I know about most boomers, of which I am one, is that we have some type of plan about retirement.   Only about 25% of firms actually plan to systematically transfer knowledge from one generation to the next.   There are 40% less people in the X generation than the boomer generation. This means you skip a level of expertise.   The issue most firms are not facing is how these demographics will affect them and what can be done to address the challenges.   Boomers are a key to the solution.   Is your firm being proactive about this?

Q: If 30-60 % of recent graduates are not employed in Architecture and the older staff is opting out. Where will new staff come from? [Frank Mascia]

SB: I don't have that statistic, knowledge about recent architectural grads but in this economy it makes sense. There are still 50% of graduates according to your information which seems like a lot given the downsized workforce.

If you are asking how to find the best talent I again recommend the topgrading process: create a network and pipeline of top talent for your next open positions; learn to use the topgrading tandem hiring interview; create a culture that attracts top talent; stay in touch with graduate level architecture instructors and find out who the best of the best is in their seminars and classes (recruit these people as interns).   Look to young architects in AIA that are providing leadership as a talent pool. Look at who is recently licensed on a regular basis.

Q: Stay in touch with past high performers - potentially you might encourage/recruit for them to come back. [Audrie Wenger]

SB: Yes, that works very well, good recommendation!

Q: With the numbers shown for insufficient hiring, you are showing $300-500.   What range of income are you comparing that too?   What size office does that relate to? [James

Wasserman]

SB: This is a general number cited by researchers like Deloitte, Taleo and others. The cost of an insufficient hire goes past salary. The time it takes to find and recruit talent, interviewing, training, reputation, loss of loyalty, high potentials that leave because you have hired badly and they don't want to work with that person or they must work harder than they should have to because someone isn't pulling their weight. Now hit the refresh button and start all over. There is a lot of unaccounted for cost in a mis-hire. My point is we have time to do it wrong and suffer the consequences but often don't take the time to do it right.

Q: **The vast majority of Architecture firms are 5 or less, is any of this presentation relevant to that 90% of firms?** [Frank Mascia]

SB: Certainly I could and have customized this discussion. However the basic principles of running a great firm starting with how one works with and manages the people resource which is 70% of your expense still apply. I mostly work with firms that employ 12-200 people.

Q: **I've read some about workplace heretics. Have you heard of this? The gist was that every office benefits from a few individuals whose personalities challenge and push and innovate the organizational and professional protocols. In particular, the article said that a bunch of heretics is unproductive. But a heretic paired with a team of very competent practitioners who will quickly adopt and deploy any superior techniques can be very, very valuable. Do you have thoughts on this and if you agree, how to you hire a couple of people?** [Joe Manganelli]

SB: Of course, you need innovators and entrepreneurs. I prefer that term to heretics. Most firms do not tolerate them well. I've found that often culture discourages behavior that is outside of the norm. The more design oriented firms probably are most tolerant and welcoming of innovators. I would never hire a heretic as you call it with low emotional intelligence. That only sabotages the workplace. So yes, hire innovators and it's a great idea to pair them with someone who is competent and will support their success.

Q: **What is the thought regarding individuals that want to be high performers, but do not necessarily with to become a leader?** [Dedia Hart]

SB: Hmmm Dedia. I think I need a conversation about this. You want to be a high performer but not a leader, is that right? Please call me. I could answer this question in so many ways but need to understand it better first.

Q: **Within a very large firm where the top management is CEO, Pres., VP, CFO and then**

middle management what is best strategy for career development? [Bill Burmeister]

SB: Each plan needs to be customized to the firm's strategy. Is your firm talking personnel strategy in your annual strategic planning sessions? What are your goals? If that isn't happening I suggest you present data or a white paper on the topic prior to the annual planning session. Work to get this information on the planning agenda. You'll note some comments in the webinar about research you can provide or call me and we can discuss this at greater length.

There are various components to discuss when developing a custom development plan and approach. But minimally I would say, identify your company's leadership success behaviors. Identify those upcoming personnel that match those behaviors. I have a very effective exercise for that process. Be sure you have success descriptions with metrics for each of your key roles. Identify possible retirees, especially of key personnel. Be sure you have a high potential person in the pipeline to be their "understudy." Take the leadership behavioral competencies you've identified and assess your key and upcoming personnel's capabilities against those behaviors. Complete style and strengths assessments. Create development plans and possible strategic learning assignments based on the assessments and behavioral learning needs. Develop your learning program. How will they be coached and mentored?

Whew! Sounds like a lot and if your firm isn't too large you are talking about a limited number of people. We often take the approach, class of 2012, class of 2013, etc. Let me know if I can help. I love taking on these types of projects. For me, there is nothing more energizing than helping a person recognize their talents and advance in their confidence and capabilities.

Q: As research becomes more a part of practice, it introduces a new set of core competencies and perspectives into the professional design services environment. In particular, there are greater risks and less clear outcomes. Do you have thoughts on how to hire for research-oriented positions and how to set expectations when anticipated outcomes and metrics may not be well-defined? [Joe Manganelli]

SB: No one can hit a target that is not defined. So that is a good place to start. What results do you expect of the researcher? What is your company's strategic plan, what is the mission of the role, what are 1-2 measures of success? You can use several assessments to determine if a person applying for a job would be highly capable of research. Let's set a phone appointment and we can discuss this at greater length.

Q: A firm may need to revise its goals and/or expectations in a bad economy. [Alfred

Johnson]

SB: I understand.   And you can still make some progress. Don't give up entirely.

If you have questions for Sandy that were not covered in this webinar, please visit her website at
http://www.sandyblahaperformanceconsulting.com/.

Practice Management Resources

To learn more about Practice Management visit their website www.aia.org/pm.

View the 2012 Practice Management webinar calendar at
http://network.aia.org/PracticeManagement/Home/WebinarResources/

Visit the AIA Best Practices webpage at http://www.aia.org/practicing/bestpractices/index.htm to get
the collective knowledge of AIA and allied members is a realm that is constantly expanding.