

How to Identify Top Performers

By
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Top Performing employees must have the right combination, for your organization, of:

- ✓ Technical skills
- ✓ Experience
- ✓ Academic Achievement
- ✓ Accreditation
- ✓ Thinking/learning styles and mental abilities
- ✓ Behavioural Characteristics
- ✓ Motivation
- ✓ Desire for working conditions/environment/etc.
- ✓ Fit with the work culture

They not only need the *ability* to do the work; they must *want* to do the work.

Someone who is a Top Performer in one organization is not necessarily going to be a Top Performer in another. Similarly, an average or poor performer in one position within your organization might be a bright light in another.

Skills are important, but in many cases can be taught or learned. Experience, academic achievement and accreditation are indicators that knowledge and skills have been learned, yet are often similar in both Top Performers and the poor/average performing employee.

“Fit” with the job and the organization often makes the difference between a Top Performing employee and a poor or average performing one. Core characteristics cannot be taught and can only be adapted some of the time. Therefore it is important to examine mental abilities, core behaviours and interests of an individual against the requirements of the position.

For example, a fast learner or one who processes information quickly may thrive in an environment where change is constant and one must quickly adapt. However, the same individual would soon get bored and lazy in a position where the duties require repetition and tasks are routine.

Similarly, a person who is decisive may be a Top Performer in a position where such power is delegated, but not one where many checks and balances are in place.

In the same way, if one thrives in a people environment but has an isolated work location they will likely perform poorly. It has little to do with skills or experience, but rather, for them, a motivating environment.

The challenge, then, is how to identify if an individual is going to be a Top Performer in a specific position in your workplace.

There are three basic steps

1. Examine the requirements of the specific position. Don't forget, similar positions may have different work environments or different challenges. You can do this by interviewing people who interact with the position and incumbents, reviewing the job description, etc. Unfortunately this is not always possible.
2. Assess the differences between top performing people in the position and poor performing incumbents. The challenge here is to be objective. There are a variety of assessment tools in the marketplace to help – some are great; others are, well, not so good. Contact bill@gilbertassociates.ca for a complementary checklist to use in evaluating different employee assessments.
3. Objectively assess the individual you are contemplating filling the position. Knowing the requirements of the position, carefully screening applicants, using quality assessment tools, carefully crafting interview questions, using case studies and assignments and conducting background checks all can contribute to gaining the information you need to identify Top Performers.

In a comprehensive review of selection methods, by Frank Schmidt and John Hunter, the authors suggest:

- Top performing unskilled/semiskilled workers perform **38% better** than poor performers.
- Top performing skilled employees perform **64% better** than their poor performing colleagues.
- Top performing managers perform **96% better** than poor managers.

Organizations cannot afford to accept mediocrity. They must have as many Top Performers in their business as possible. In order to attract, hire and keep them, they must know what makes a Top Performer different from their average and poor colleagues. Initially it may take time to do the analysis, but then the rewards follow – in productivity, in lower turnover and in a happier workplace.

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