

Staffing Up for the (Eventual) Rebound

While a strong resume is important, the person behind the resume is key.

By Patrick S. Duffy

Back in the early 1990s, I once interviewed for a market research job with a public home builder for which I knew I was perfect. With multiple recommendations from industry contacts as well as from the person who currently had the job but was leaving the company, I figured I was a shoo-in for the position. But I wasn't. In fact, the job went to a guy who had worked for a well-known accounting firm which focused on real estate. Yet something in my gut told me this guy wouldn't last because the job was much more than simply figuring out spreadsheets: it also involved the sort of qualitative experience that allows an experienced consultant to identify what makes a community, floor plan or marketing strategy better than the competition's.

Less than a year later, the winning applicant had moved on, probably to another accounting firm, thus leaving the builder to replace the same position twice in as many years. So what went wrong in the hiring process? I'd say it was because the person making the decision made the very common mistake of hiring the resume, and not the person behind it.

With that experience behind me, I had the chance during the recent boom years to hire a consultant to work with other members of a well-entrenched team. For someone focused too much on the resume, he certainly wasn't a shoo-in, either, having hopped between new home consulting and selling existing homes. But I was still impressed with his reasons for trying out new positions in real estate, his easy-going nature and thought that both existing staff and clients would like working with him.

The kicker, of course, was whether or not he could write with the clarity and vocabulary

required of the position, so I asked for a writing sample. And not only was he a gifted writer, but he turned out to be a tremendous asset to the team – all because I considered his resume merely a starting point and nothing more. In fact, it was his varied experiences which made him even more qualified for the position, because we could then take on a greater variety of assignments as opposed to the limited menu that had been typical in the past.

I bring this up because sometime over the next 18 months, builders and developers will again be staffing up to fill various positions, and yet on social networking sites such as LinkedIn, I see people with 15 to 20 years of doing the exact same thing with different companies. Perhaps they're good at some specific task, but for the next stage of real estate development, I think hiring people with multiple skill sets will ultimately separate the winners from the laggards.

Being brave enough to try out new things – whether it's striking out on your own or switching to an entirely new department – also shows the type of leadership qualities which help mold future executives. In many cases, those hints of future brilliance often occur in places far outside of the building industry, such as volunteering for a local political race, coaching a soccer team or organizing a church event, all of which reveal skills essential for any workplace.

My own resume still lists some of my own volunteer work from five to ten years ago, and I know some well-meaning experts might declare such things irrelevant. But I think it's still quite relevant how I managed – through sheer force of will and preparation – to convince a nationally known charity, a top television network, a major studio and one of the most successful sitcoms on the air to take a chance on an unproven idea that had never

been done in the history of the medium.

In August of 1999, "An Evening With Frasier" was the first of five charity fund-raisers set around a live taping of a top TV show, and that experience taught me that in any business, success is achieved by assembling the right team, constantly leaning into your own zone of discomfort and having the willingness to respectfully ask for the moon but remaining flexible enough to deal with 'no.' And you'll never find those qualities if you simply skim through resumes looking for specific code words.



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Fast Facts

- Hire the entire person, not just the resume.
- Look for intellectual curiosity and the willingness to take on new job roles.
- If possible, always ask for work samples. Some people just interview well!
- Respect the leadership roles that people take on outside of the workplace.