



Great Candidates Ask Great Questions

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John O. Burdett



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There is not a lot in life that can be said to be “certain.” Indeed, disruption, discontinuous change and political divisiveness make figuring out what the future will look like more difficult than ever. That said, one thing is absolutely assured: tomorrow is not going to be a replay of today. Consider the following:

1. We are facing more change in the next decade-and-a-half than has unfolded in total since the printing press was invented.
2. The competitor you need to be most concerned about is a business you have never heard of.
3. Organizations, by way of design and underlying competitive assumptions, built in the last century, are a total misfit for this century. “Working museums” staffed by high paid curators comes close to the truth.
4. A combination of AI, block chain, robotics, 3D printing, breakthrough materials and unprecedented computing power not only combine to produce a change dynamic that is difficult to understand, we are quickly moving into an era where tomorrow’s challenge is beyond our capacity to understand.
5. Data is becoming so readily available that its worth is quickly declining. Knowledge and know-how still have worth but the real business to be in is “knowledge of knowledge.”



One of the disturbing outcomes of the above is that leaders who can chart a course through this unprecedented level of uncertainty have become a pretty rare breed. And if you think finding top talent is difficult today, as we move further into a world of exponential change, know that it’s about to get a lot harder.

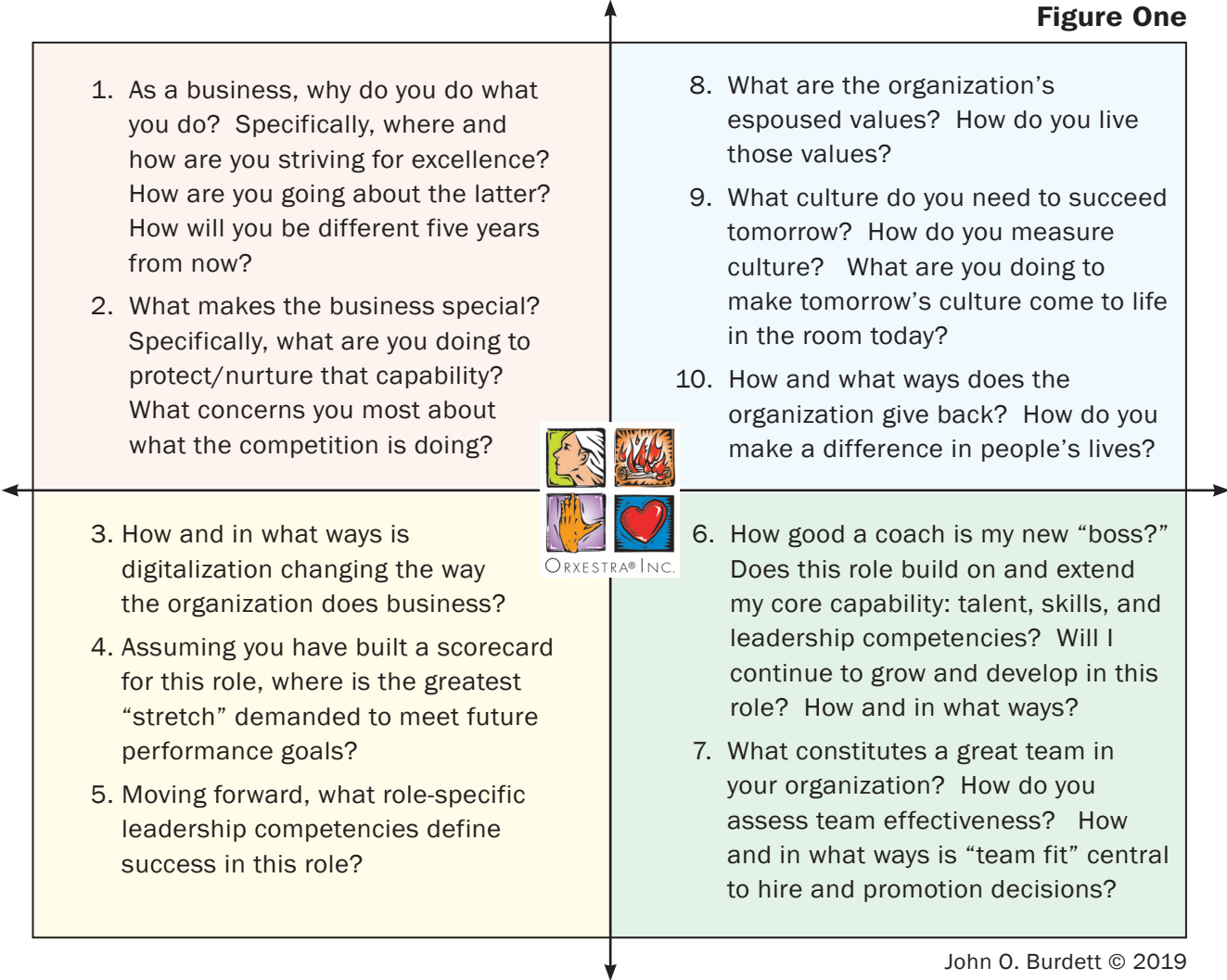


If you are not regularly upgrading your talent pipeline you are losing ground. If you are not revisiting how you train executives into how to interview you are destroying value. And if you haven't developed a process that focuses on the *right* candidate rather than the *best* candidate you are putting your business at risk.

Uncovering, informing, involving, inspiring and successfully bringing on board great candidates draws on six fundamental, hiring building blocks.¹

1. A winning hiring value proposition. People don't join your organization ... they connect with your story. Your story answers five questions: (1) Why do we do what we do? (2)

Figure One



10 Candidate Questions

¹ For more on the six building blocks of talent acquisition see *The Empty Suit*. John O. Burdett (2016).



Where are we heading? (3) What are our values?² (4) What makes us special? (5) How does what we do make a difference in people's lives?

2. The means to define (measure) both the organization culture you have and the culture you need. Successful recruitment is always strategic! Hiring with today's culture in mind only makes sense if tomorrow is going to be a replay of today.³
3. A robust performance scorecard.
4. The means to define the emerging role-specific leadership competencies.
5. In that tomorrow's organization will be a team of teams, the tools to measure and assess future team fit.⁴
6. An integration process that provides the structure, support and the tools to enable newly hired executives to take a leadership role in their own integration. Given the opportunity, leaders lead!

If any of the six attributes are missing know that the inevitable default action is that the recruitment process becomes little more than a beauty contest. The candidate might look and sound good but it's not that terrific résumé you worked your way through that walks in the door on Monday ... it's the person you just hired. Shake hands with the empty suit. Welcome to the recruiter's version of *Groundhog Day*.



Welcome also to the reality that top candidates come way better prepared for the interview than does the typical interviewer. And keep in mind, where the interviewee is truly a top candidate both parties are being fully evaluated. All this brings us to **Figure One:** 10 Candidate Questions that, as a recruiter, you must know how to answer. Although by no means replete, in some ways, the 10 questions outlined are an acid test of how prepared you are for the turbulent talent management path that lies ahead.

It's also important to keep in mind that at the very heart of the recruiter-candidate relationship lies trust. A compact that underscores the role of the recruiter as an honest broker: a true professional who is looking out for the best interest of both the organization and

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- 2 The majority of organizations claim to have "values." For most, however, they represent little more than window dressing. For organizations that are truly values-driven, those values represent "the background music" that plays at every stage of the interview/selection process.
 - 3 For more on how to measure organization culture see *The A-Z of Organization Culture*. John O. Burdett (2017).
 - 4 For more on how to measure team effectiveness see *TEAM*. John O. Burdett (2015).



the candidate. Are the questions outlined in **Figure one** those the candidate should be asking? What's the best way to introduce them?

Finally, we face the reality that different generational cohorts will come at the questions outlined in a different way. Look at it this way. For the “boomers” IBM stood for “I’ve been moved.” They drank the Kool-Aid. For generation X IBM stands for “Invest in better management.” This generation needs to feel that the organization is developing them. For millennials IBM stands for “Inspire a better me.” Purpose, meaning and self-esteem come to the fore.⁵ The boomers were striving to create something different. Gen X managers want to be different. They want to stand out. Millennials want to make a difference.

Conclusion: Tomorrow will not be a replay of today. Finding and landing top talent is only going to get more difficult. If your talent acquisition approach amounts to little more than a beauty contest you are putting the business at risk. To mitigate that risk, a robust recruitment process and an investment in preparation for the interview become a twenty-first century leadership imperative. Although, of necessity, the 10 questions outlined in **Figure One** are incomplete, they represent a good place to start thinking about how to make who and how you hire a competitive advantage. Your goal should be nothing less.

5 A research study by **BetterUp** indicated that employees would, on average, be willing to forfeit 23% of their earnings for work that had meaning.



John has extensive international experience as a senior executive. As a consultant he has worked in more than 40 countries for organizations that are household names. He is best known for his work on: (1) organization culture with organizations that rank among the largest in the world; (2) breakthrough tools/processes to support talent management at the top of the organization. The latter are utilized by many hundreds of international businesses on five continents. John has also coached a number of prominent CEOs and C-suite executives in different parts of the world.

John has a doctorate in management development. A Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, he has twice won international awards for his business articles. Other awards include being named by FINTRA as the international coach of the year and a teaching excellence award while teaching on the MBA program at the University of Toronto.

He has published twelve best-selling books on leadership and organization culture. *Attract, Select, Develop & Retain TALENT* came out in 2014. *TEAM* is the second in his talent trilogy (2015). The third - *The Empty Suit* - was added in early 2016. *The A-Z of Organization Culture* was published in 2017. *Tomorrow Will Be Different - Will You?* came out in 2019.

A number of John's books can be downloaded digitally from Amazon.com, eBooks, Kobo and/or Barnes and Noble.

The founder of Orxestra Inc., he is a leadership advisor to the Bedford Group and a strategic partner to TRANSEARCH International. He lives in Toronto.



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