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# **How to Hire for Attitude and Potential When Skills Are Scarce**

**Skills Can Be Taught -  
Attitude Cannot -  
How to Hire Accordingly**

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### **What You Will Learn**

- Why attitude-first hiring is a strategic decision, not a compromise
- The seven signals of potential that predict long-term performance
- How to structure your interviews to surface these qualities reliably
- What to do after you hire to protect your investment and develop your people

### **Skills Can Be Taught - Attitude Cannot - How to Hire Accordingly**

When the talent pool is thin, the easiest mistake is to keep searching for a candidate who does not exist. ManpowerGroup's 2025 Talent Shortage Survey reports that 74% of employers globally are struggling to fill roles.

Most business owners and hiring managers respond in one of two ways. They either hold out for someone who meets every requirement, losing months and momentum in the process, or they settle for the closest available match and hope for the best. Neither approach serves the business well.

There is a third option. It requires a shift in thinking, but it consistently produces stronger long-term hires. Hire for attitude and potential. Train for the skills you need. This is not a soft compromise. It is a deliberate strategy grounded in data, and it starts with understanding why the traditional skills-first approach carries more risk than most leaders realise.

### **The Problem With Hiring Only on Skills**

Recruiting for technical skills is logical. You need someone who can do the job, so you build a job description around the role as it exists today. But roles rarely stay still, and skills have a shelf life that is shortening with every year that passes.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects that 39% of existing skill sets will be disrupted or displaced within five years. The candidate whose CV ticks every box today may be misaligned with where your business needs to be in three years.

There is also the financial reality of getting it wrong. A bad hire costs an average of £132,000 in the UK once recruitment fees, lost productivity, and management time are factored in.

That cost is not just financial. A poor hire in a specialist role affects client relationships, team morale, and your reputation in a candidate market that talks. The knock-on effects can take months to correct.

Hiring based on technical skills alone, without weighing attitude and potential, significantly increases the likelihood that cost will land on your desk. The stronger approach is to treat skills as trainable and to recruit first for the qualities that cannot be developed after the fact.

## **What Attitude and Potential Actually Look Like**

Attitude is not about personality or whether someone is likeable in an interview. It is about the qualities that determine how a person performs when things get hard, when the brief changes, and when new demands emerge without warning.

Research consistently points to seven observable signals of high potential. These are the traits to look for when the perfect-skills candidate is not available, and equally when they are.

### **Learning Agility**

Learning agility is the willingness and ability to acquire new skills quickly and apply them in unfamiliar situations. In a market where role requirements are shifting, this is arguably more valuable than any single technical qualification. A candidate who can get up to speed in a new area within weeks will serve a business far better than one whose expertise is fixed and narrowing.

### **Coachability**

Coachability is the capacity to receive feedback and act on it without becoming defensive. This matters enormously in roles where client expectations, internal processes, and team dynamics all evolve. Candidates who treat feedback as information rather than criticism consistently improve faster than those who do not.

### **Growth Mindset**

Drawn from psychologist Carol Dweck's research, a growth mindset is the belief that ability develops through effort and persistence. Employees with this quality treat setbacks as information rather than as evidence of failure. They are more likely to push through difficulty, seek out development, and raise the standard of work around them.

### **Resilience**

Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulty without disengaging. Where client demands can be significant, and timelines are often unforgiving, people who absorb pressure without withdrawing are disproportionately valuable. This quality shows up not in how someone describes a success, but in how they describe a failure and what they did next.

## **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence covers self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to manage relationships under pressure. High-EI employees collaborate more effectively, handle conflict more constructively, and tend to retain both clients and colleagues. In client-facing roles in particular, this quality often determines who delivers and who creates problems.

## **Initiative**

Initiative is the habit of identifying what needs to be done without being prompted. This is distinct from ambition. It is the practical, day-to-day ownership of outcomes. A candidate who spots a gap, proposes a solution, and acts before being asked is demonstrating one of the most valuable qualities any business can recruit for.

## **Intellectual Curiosity**

Intellectual curiosity is a genuine interest in understanding how and why things work. Curious people ask better questions, identify problems earlier, and tend to generate improvements rather than simply repeat established processes. They are also more likely to remain engaged in a role over the medium and long term.

None of these qualities appears reliably on a CV. They need to be surfaced deliberately through structured interviewing, and they need to be supported and developed once the person is in the role.

## **How to Assess Attitude and Potential in an Interview**

**The STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result)** is the most reliable framework for behavioural interviewing. Rather than asking what a candidate would do in a hypothetical, it asks what they actually did in a real situation. This gives you genuine evidence of how they think and behave, not how they present themselves.

Structured behavioural interviewing is consistently shown to predict job performance more accurately than unstructured conversation. The investment in preparing the right questions is small. The return on getting it right is significant.

### **Here are four questions designed to surface the qualities that matter most:**

**To assess learning agility:** "Tell me about a time you had to learn a new skill or process quickly under pressure. What did you do, and how did you apply what you learned?"

**To assess coachability:** "Describe a time when you received feedback that was difficult to hear. How did you respond, and what changed as a result?"

**To assess resilience:** "Walk me through a situation where a project or role was not going the way you expected. What did you do, and what was the outcome?"

**To assess initiative:** "Tell me about something you identified as a problem or gap in your previous role and decided to address without being asked."

Listen for the thinking beneath the answer. A candidate who describes genuine learning from failure is demonstrating a growth mindset.

A candidate who attributes every outcome to circumstance or other people is showing you something important, too. The quality of the self-reflection tells you far more than the specific situation described.

It is also worth noting what is absent. Candidates who struggle to recall a time they received difficult feedback, or who cannot describe a setback without placing full responsibility elsewhere, are telling you something about how they operate under pressure. That information is worth having before you make an offer.

## **What Happens After You Hire Matters Just as Much**

Hiring for potential only delivers a return if you invest in developing it. Research shows that 22% of employee turnover occurs within the first 45 days. Onboarding is not an administrative process. It is one of the highest-risk windows in any employment relationship, and it is the period when the gap between what was promised and what is delivered becomes visible to the new hire.

A structured 90-day onboarding plan, with clear milestones, regular check-ins, and named points of contact, significantly reduces early attrition. For someone hired on attitude rather than deep sector experience, that structure is even more important. It signals that the investment is mutual and that the business will fulfil its part of the agreement.

Beyond onboarding, strengths-based development tends to produce stronger performance outcomes than focusing on correcting weaknesses. LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report consistently confirms that learning and development opportunities rank among the top reasons employees choose to remain with an employer. In a sector where your competitors are all fishing from the same talent pool, being known as a business that develops people is a genuine competitive advantage.

Building an internal talent pipeline also reduces long-term dependence on a market that is showing no signs of easing. The businesses that will hire most effectively over the next three years are those that are developing people today, not waiting for the right external candidate to appear.

## **Why This Matters More as Technology Accelerates**

Automation is not replacing jobs uniformly. It is replacing tasks: the predictable, the repeatable, the process-driven. The World Economic Forum projects that 85 million roles will be displaced by automation while 97 million new ones emerge, most of them requiring distinctly human capabilities.

PwC's AI Jobs Barometer 2025 confirms that roles requiring emotional intelligence, problem-solving under ambiguity, and interpersonal influence are growing in demand, not declining. These are precisely the qualities that attitude-first hiring is designed to identify.

When you recruit someone with high learning agility, strong emotional intelligence, and genuine initiative, you are not making a compromise because skills are hard to find. You are hiring the person best placed to navigate a role that will almost certainly change in the next two to three years. That is a different frame, and it is more accurate.

### **Five Actions to Take This Quarter**

1. **Audit your current job descriptions.** Are they describing the role as it exists today, or the capability you need for the next three years? Revise them to reflect both.
2. **Add at least two STAR-based behavioural questions** to every interview process, focused on learning agility and coachability. Run them consistently across every candidate, not selectively.
3. **Create a structured 90-day onboarding plan** for every new hire, with formal check-in points at 30, 60, and 90 days. Name a person responsible for each stage.
4. **Identify two or three people already in your team** who show high potential but are not currently in a development programme. Start a conversation with them this month.
5. **Work with a specialist recruiter** who is already assessing attitude and cultural fit as part of their process. A good specialist recruiter surfaces candidates who would never appear on a job board and who have already been assessed for the qualities that predict success in your market.

## A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

### I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

### I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

### So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

### Now - #1 Bestseller on Amazon -

**Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop**

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