

# What are the key traits you look for when hiring an employee?

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I had the pleasure of speaking to Masters students in Health Administration at George Mason University. During the conversation, one student asked, “What are the key traits you look for when hiring a new employee?” to which I replied, “I look for one characteristic above all others: that I would gladly work *for* that person.”

As someone who has hired several employees in my current and previous roles, I find there is no one trait that defines all good employees. On the contrary; I look for a collection of traits and characteristics. At the end of the day, though, it boils down to me asking myself: *would I want to work for that person?* In other words, an ideal employee, in my mind, is someone I can envision as an admirable employer.

I adore every boss I’ve ever worked for and admire every employee I’ve ever hired. At first, I thought maybe I was simply lucky to work with such great people. I am lucky. I also spend a lot of time getting to know people. The most important aspect of my career decisions have been made around who I will work for and with. I’ve left previous places of work and former employees have moved on, but the relationships remain strong; so strong, in fact, that past employers support my current work with their time and finances, and past employees choose to stay connected on their own accord. In other words, the same traits and characteristics in my bosses that make me happy to work for them can be found in the *actions* of the employees I choose to hire.

Hiring an employee requires much more than determining whether he or she has the technical skills to do the job, though that is a compulsory the first step. Just as I would only choose to work *for* someone who has the technical skills to do his or her job, it is imperative for my business to consider an employee’s technical ability to execute.

Above and beyond skills, however, I have observed an intense intellectual curiosity in all of my bosses. I look for this same eagerness to learn in each potential employee. While it may seem that bosses are supposed to be concerned with leading and delegating as opposed to learning and growing, I find that excellent bosses are among the most willing to learn; they are curious to explore future industry trends, they read and listen voraciously, and they ask thoughtful questions.

I’ll never forget the time my boss read an article I shared with him, and then proceeded to circle the articles from the appendix that interested him so that he could read those articles later. I couldn’t believe it. How could someone so busy and important make the time to research the research?! I discovered his inquisitive nature is a key part of what makes him so busy and important in the first place. As a result of actions like these, I’ve made it a necessity for potential employees to demonstrate genuine curiosity.

I also believe that the bosses worthy of respect don’t see any task as below them. All of my bosses have been willing to stuff envelopes or carry boxes, when required. Similarly, it is important that my employees are willing to stuff envelopes or take out the trash at the day’s end, and equally important that I am willing to do the same for the benefit of our team and organization.

My bosses and employees have consistently been willing to go to bat for me, in public as well as when I’m not looking. Similarly, I am the first to stand up for my employees before my bosses (The Global Good Fund’s board of directors, in this case).

People who are willing to learn, willing to do small tasks, and willing to support their employees and their bosses, are the people I am humbled to be surrounded by, whether in a multi-national corporate setting, a domestic multi-billion-dollar non-profit, or today’s start-up, The Global Good Fund. How does one find these people?

**They speak publicly about living a life of purpose through their work**, like Global Good Fund board member [Michael Sneed](#), who I originally heard speak at the [EY Strategic Growth Forum](#). Michael could speak about any number of technical topics, but he instead chose to speak about what makes his daily work meaningful.

**They give you the time of day**, like [Knox Singleton](#), The Global Good Fund's co-founder, my former boss and [book co-author](#). Knox agreed to a meeting with me when I was an intern at the 16,000-person organization he leads. He didn't have to do that, but he chose to be humble and accessible. Upon hiring me, Knox helped carry my empty boxes during my first day of work, which made a hugely positive impression on me. (I was so impressed and simultaneously mortified that my boss was carrying my recycling.)

**They take a risk on you and co-create opportunities**, like [Tama Duffy Day](#), another former boss and volunteer with The Global Good Fund. Tama gave me my first job after school at an international architecture and design firm — keep in mind I had neither architecture nor design skills, at least not in the traditional sense. Years later, Tama offered to host a Global Good Fund Salon at her home, and helped our team attract two new Global Good Fund mentors. She then went on to be a Global Good Fund mentor herself.

**They give before they ask**, like [Manolo Paez](#), our current VP of Strategy and previous volunteer at The Global Good Fund. Manolo was such an incredible volunteer that I was eager to spend more time getting to know him and eventually created a job opportunity because of his demonstrated commitment to the organization.

**They stick around to see things through**, like HKelly Shin, our previous Program Manager and [Atlas Corps](#) Fellow, who remained on staff for the execution of a project even though her contract was set to expire. Like HKelly, incredible employees and bosses engage without question or expectation of reward, but because you ask, and even when you didn't. In HKelly's case, she performed beautifully, even when I was not physically present to in-person monitor her work.

**They challenge you in thoughtful ways**, like Karin Fujii, our former Senior Director of Fellowship and Expansion, who asked what seemed to be a billion questions before being hired, because she cared. Similarly, Wood Parker, a Global Good Fund volunteer, has demonstrated this trait by being receptive as a sounding board when I ask him a multitude of questions.

My belief is that actions speak louder than words. The employees I hire act in ways that allow me to envision myself happily working for them, and that is the key trait I look for when considering a new hire. Equally, I aspire to be an employer other people want to work for and alongside.