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What is this?

14 important traits employers look for in new hires



L-R: Anindo Dey, Ryan Williams, Cheryl Williams, Michael Ellenhorn, Steve Carstensen, Priya Cloutier, David Wescott, Solomon Timothy, Jonathan Keyser, Rachel Namoff, Steve Smallman, Joy Frestedt, Chris Karlo, Brian McCarthy



The Business Journals Leadership Trust By Business Journals Leadership Trust Expert Panel®

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Bringing on a new team member is one of the most important and impactful decisions a leader makes. The wrong choice can lead to costly setbacks, so leaders need to identify the must-have traits new hires need to bring to the table. And while the right

skill set is important, there are also certain characteristics – such as good communication and patience – that you should never compromise on.

We asked members of [Business Journals Leadership Trust](#) to share the nonnegotiable traits they look for in every new hire and why they're so important. Their answers are below.

1. Honesty

If a prospective employee has it, all the other good traits will follow. Honesty will build trust, even if their ideas diverge from my own. Diversity of ideas will help the team openly question decisions, and open discussions will lead to better decisions. Better decisions lead to better management. - [Anindo Dey, Alibris Inc.](#)

2. Curiosity

The most identifying trait is curiosity. Individuals who need to understand how things work will yield results. They are investigative and inquisitive, and they make logical decisions. Armed with data, they recognize how to apply their knowledge to a problem in a meaningful way. - [Ryan Williams, The Websuasion Group LLC](#)

3. Empathy

I've personally developed from being one of the worst bosses to one of the best by flipping the script – focusing on others first, before myself. As a result, I know how critical empathy is for success as a teammate or employee and, unfortunately, that it's not a given. - [Cheryl Williams, Hudgins Williams Associates](#)

4. Integrity

For me, integrity is the only “nonnegotiable.” Different roles require different skill sets, but integrity is the bedrock upon which successful professional partnerships are built. You really have to know the people you are bringing into your business before it's too late. Success without integrity is a failure and, in the end, that lack of integrity will kill everything you are trying to build. - [Michael Ellenhorn, Decipher](#)

5. Honest confidence

They have to be able to claim their expertise and be willing to employ their skills to contribute to the success of our team. The “honest” part means they can say they don’t know something – that comes from the integrity and values other experts have cited. One cannot have honest confidence without a commitment to integrity. - [Steve Carstensen, Premier Sleep](#)

6. Entrepreneurial spirit

The trait I look for is entrepreneurship – that is, whether the person is willing to take risks and be wrong. It is my opinion that if you have always been successful and won, you haven’t stretched as a person. I want someone who’s not afraid of stretching. - [Priya Cloutier, Cloutier Arnold Jacobowitz PLLC](#)

7. Shared values

If our values don’t align, then the employment won’t last long. They have to be engaged and on the same page. When John F. Kennedy was visiting NASA, he asked a janitor what he was doing, and the response was, “Mr. President, I’m helping put a man on the moon.” That is total alignment. That is core values shared and driven so that everyone believes they are making a difference and everyone is part of the team. - [David Wescott, Transblue](#)

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8. Proactivity

Proactive research is something that I always look for in candidates. A good prospect arrives at the interview having done enough research on the company to express how they would best fit. It’s essential to always come prepared for our clients and our team. - [Solomon Thimothy, OneIMS](#)

9. Cultural fit

For us, culture is nonnegotiable. We look for people who are aligned around our principles and our mission, and only if that box is checked do we proceed to the next step. Having misaligned people within any organization can be highly destructive to an organization's success, so for us, this is our nonnegotiable. We also look for people who are nice and respectful to others. - [Jonathan Keyser, Keyser](#)

10. Adaptability

Adaptability is necessary in a prospective employee. We live in a fast-paced world that is constantly changing – the one constant is change. Everyone on the team must be able to adapt and adjust to change so that they stay relevant and engaged in their job function. - [Rachel Namoff, Arapaho Asset Management](#)

11. A good attitude

In reality, I try to assess three things. Talent is table stakes – they have to have an obvious knack for the job. We can give them experience. If they're smart, teachable and talented, they'll gain valuable experience very quickly. Attitude is hard to fake and hard to teach. If they are defensive, lack curiosity or seem set in their ways, my "Spidey Sense" tells me to steer clear. - [Steve Smallman, Fifteen4](#)

12. Critical thinking

Knowing how to find scientifically substantiated information is more difficult than ever before. Being able to differentiate between nonsense and fact is a skill we need. - [Joy Frestedt, Frestedt Incorporated](#)

13. A desire to learn and grow

We look for a demonstrable interest and desire to continually learn and grow. While it's important in any field, it is particularly important in software development, where the knowledge used is constantly changing as technology advances. - [Chris Karlo, MercuryWorks](#)

14. Openness to change

Integrity is my top answer because it goes to the core of your character. The other big trait is being open to change. I am always looking to improve my business, which requires me to be continuously open to better ideas. So I need a teammate who can help create the change and not resist it. - [Brian McCarthy, Birmingham Orthodontics](#)