



Cultural Fit Vs. Skills: How To Break a Hiring Tie

By Rhonda Ness

We could spend a lot of time bouncing between arguments that say cultural fit is the be-all-end-all in hiring and those that say skills should trump.

But the truth is – both cultural fit and skills are vitally important for building a solid workforce.

Just think – if all of your employees lacked the skills they needed in their roles, not only would the work go undone, but there would be no one else to steer the ship.

And what if all your employees were working like their jobs were solo missions? Cultural fit ensures that your employees collaborate and use their skills in a way that supports others.

So what happens when you have two appealing job candidates – one with excellent skills and one with fewer skills, but who seems like a much better cultural fit?

How to Choose the “Right” One

The right choice all comes down to who’s hiring and training the new employee. That person should answer these questions:

What are you willing to compromise on?

What are you willing to teach?

What would be easier for you to train?

Prioritize your desired qualities based on these questions, and you are more likely to be happy with your hiring decision in the long run.

Just remember:

Cultural fit is not easily trainable. It’s the makeup of someone – who they are and what they bring to the table.

If your corporate culture doesn’t overlap with who your candidate is innately, it will be difficult to change them.

Most people can pick up new skills with relative ease if you have the time to train them.

Fortunately, there are additional steps you can take at the beginning of the hiring process to help ensure more of your top candidates would mesh well with your corporate culture.

1. Assess your corporate culture first. Do you know what makes people want to work for you? This is referred to as a company’s sizzle factor. Your company’s size, dress code,

work schedule, values, benefits, etc., along with this sizzle factor all work together to form your corporate culture. For example, on Insperty's website, we have a page dedicated to helping potential applicants understand our culture. Maybe your company puts a large emphasis on professional development. Make this known. Include it in your mission and values. Doing this can help you attract like-minded candidates.

2. Don't use generic job descriptions. Your culture can set the tone of your messaging to prospective employees, and that should be your goal for your advertised job openings. This involves letting your company's personality come through in your descriptions and being specific about what the job will require beyond the skills and responsibilities. For example, will the new employees regularly interact with clients or prospects? Will they work alone or in a team? How does their job support your company's overall mission? With a clear and precise job description, you can eliminate any confusion about what's expected of the applicant right off the bat.
3. Ask cultural fit interview questions. In interviews, ask your candidates to share previous experiences that would help you envision whether they're right for your context. This is sometimes called behavioral or situational interviewing.

Here are a couple of examples:

Share a time with me when you were working on a team. What was your part? How were you successful in working with your colleagues?

Share an experience with me when you were targeting your next promotion.

Many times candidates avoid these questions by talking in broad terms and not giving specific examples. Look for answers that include stories and experiences from the candidates' work history. Ask follow up questions if you need to encourage them to open up further.

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