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## **Four things recruiters look for to size up candidates' potential**

**Hiring managers always need to assess candidates' ability to grow, especially new grads with little experience. These are some key signs of standout traits.**

*By Yewande Ige and Will Philips* 3 minute Read



[Photo: Evan Kirby/Unsplash]

I've recruited countless graduates for roles in many organizations over the past decade, and I'm constantly asked what I look for. My answer is always the same: potential.

This is especially true for entry-level hires. Obviously, there's no point in assessing recent grads the same way that you would more experienced candidates. Without much work experience or familiarity with the workplace, those candidates need to bring something else to the table—namely the ability to pick things up quickly and apply new ideas on their own. Here are a few concrete qualities that signal potential in entry-level (or any!) candidates—and what job seekers can do to show those traits off.

## 1. Determination

I currently work for a tech company called ThoughtWorks, which looks beyond traditional credentials like college majors and grades to make hiring decisions. To be a software developer you don't necessarily have to have a computer science degree. Maybe you taught yourself to code in your free time, which tells me something much more powerful—that you're committed to learning your craft and determined to succeed.

In fact, I've noticed recently that some of our most successful graduate hires in Australia have come to us through an intensive coding bootcamp, and what they sometimes lack in technical ability, they make up for with drive. Skills from elsewhere in their academic careers and previous work experience tend to be transferrable, as long as they've got grit and determination.

## 2. Passion

Passion and determination are close cousins but remain distinct. The former is about creativity and enthusiasm, and the latter is about strategy and ambition; both are strong predictors of potential.

To assess a candidate's passion, I ask myself how excited they seem at the prospect of joining the team—and how excited *I* am at bringing them on board. Will they introduce new ideas or fresh energy? What will they bring to the table? Everyone on a team can learn from each other, whether they've got 10 months' or 10 years' experience, so I tend to look for candidates who demonstrate creative thinking and an eagerness to learn. I also ask myself whether I'd be happy coaching or mentoring them, since their passion and enthusiasm will drive them forward and fuel their growth—but without it, their potential to learn diminishes.

## 3. Self-awareness

Ideally, every new hire should be able to grow with the organization, adapting to larger changes. To do that, they need to be aware of themselves and how they fit into the overall company culture.

Feedback is the key here. New hires need to be open to constructive criticism, otherwise they risk curbing their own potential to grow and evolve. But hiring managers and recruiters also need to be clear about the characteristics they *don't* want to see as well as the ones they expect new hires to cultivate. So be sure to find someone who's open to the ideas of others, [respects their](#)

[colleagues' differences](#), and takes feedback well—in short, someone who's sufficiently self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses to be able to learn and adapt.

## 4. Aptitude

Technical skills can be picked, and professional maturity comes with time and experience, but every new hire needs to be able to learn quickly in order to reach their full potential. And for that, there's no substitute for good, old-fashioned aptitude.

Look for assessments and [interview questions](#) that let candidates demonstrate how inquisitive they are. You might even ask them to describe an experience when they had to learn something new on the fly. Some interviewers even devise exercises and practicums that give candidates a chance to collaborate on a shared outcome, and I've found this is often a great way to gauge potential: Don't tell us what you can do, *show* us. There's no better way to find out if someone has the ability to do something than by asking them to demonstrate it.

Keeping these attributes in mind can help you spot candidates with the most promise to grow into future leaders. And if you're a job seeker, remember that recruiters and hiring managers are *always* assessing your potential, even if they haven't devised a formal method for doing that. So when in doubt, take your own initiative and show off these four traits as best you can. They'll never steer you wrong.

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