

Fast Lane

George Thomas, CEO, George Thomas Contractor Inc.

Assembling a team

HOW TO ASSESS JOB CANDIDATES DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

BY CAROLYN LAWELL

If you look for George Thomas Contractor Inc. in the phone book, you won't find it. In fact, you won't find the company advertised anywhere.

That's because George Thomas, founder, president and CEO, has built his \$8 million construction company on sheer reputation.

Part of that is doing good work, says Thomas. But it starts with being selective and hiring the right people.

"We make it very difficult to get into the company because we get a better class of worker," Thomas says.

Smart Business spoke with Thomas about how to interview to find the right employees are right for your team.

Q. How do you know when a job candidate is right for your company?

For me, it starts with looking for a man or a woman in the eye and quickly building a first impression.

There are often things that people will say to you or write on their resume or application. As the CEO, you must know what to listen for and study the application to see if there are inconsistencies.

Sometimes it's not what a prospective employee says; it's what he doesn't say.

Q. How do you spot inconsistencies during the interviewing process?

For example, if I would look at their resume and it says, "I worked for so-and-so from this period to that period, and for so-and-so from this period to that period," then in the con-

versation, something else comes up that they worked, for but it's not in that time frame nor is the name mentioned. To me, that's an inconsistency as to why didn't you mention that.

Then I would probe a little bit into, "Well, I'm looking at your resume, but it doesn't mention this particular thing that you did for three years. Why is that? Did you forget it?"

It may be that they got fired or they had a bad experience. It may not be their fault, or it may be something they want to forget. But they didn't put it down.

When you're looking this person in the eye, most seasoned or better entrepreneurs or employers, after looking at the resume and the qualifications, they kind of get a sense of the rightness and the truthfulness of what they're dealing with. I look for that.

Then, in some cases, I sense that they're just very forthright, open, honest people. Sometimes I feel like I'm getting a little bit of a line, and that causes me to look more carefully at the information that they've given me. It also tips me to ask questions that I might not otherwise ask — probably knowledge that I have in the more difficult areas of running a job.

Most people, because I'm older, don't realize that I was in the field for many years when I was younger. They don't understand that I know construction extremely well.

I will ask questions directly pertaining, which kind of catches them off guard, about more difficult things like, can you do a rafter cut. Then, all of a sudden, I'll know pretty quickly if they're running me a story or if they really know.

I don't try to catch them off guard. I listen to what they tell me, and if it doesn't seem completely correct or as if I'm not getting a totally truthful story about their abilities, I will probe.

Then that's a whole different set of questions, which go directly to the quality of the

product. Most CEOs don't know how to do that, they're just CEOs. They didn't spend 12 years in the field with a belt on.

Q. How do you recognize in the short period of an interview whether the person possesses the qualities you're looking for?

I think it really just comes from asking the right questions.

When you look a person in the eye, people are usually excited about their interview, they're nervous about their interview, they're complacent, they're down, they're depressed. I think you just have to pay attention to their body language.

The most important thing in any interview is your ability to listen and not to talk.

I listen very carefully when they're talking. It sends me in all kinds of directions mentally.

Don't think about what you want to say or your questions. Once you've asked it, be all ears. Be listening to what the person says.

I'm constantly searching for an upbeat, teamwork mentality, a sense of honesty, a strong desire to do what is right.

Q. Once someone's on board, how do you then foster that sense of teamwork and honesty among employees?

I think it's the whole air of your company — the openness of it, the willingness to let people know how you're doing financially, be it good or negative.

Once you make them a part of that honesty and openness, they become part of worrying about it. If they're worrying about or happy about the financial situation of the company, they get drawn into the company, and they start to treat the company as if it's their own. <<



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