



# LUCK

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David was a terrific sales guy—at least on paper. He did have one or two excellent years in the nine years he had been in sales. He was aggressive and assertive and had a great military background before he began a sales career. He rocked along for nine years but always managed to sabotage the jobs he had, even when he performed well. He managed to go through six jobs in that nine-year period.

His first marriage was tumultuous at best. Six years of marriage was interrupted by two one-year stints of separation. The two drug rehab episodes didn't help. One was for three months and, a year later, another for six months. Everyone agreed that David was probably a really good salesperson but his personal life had gotten in his way and, some say, his “real self” came out and his performance was mediocre.

It took David and us six months and at least fifteen interviews to get an employer to take a chance on him. He's been with the firm for seven years now. For four of those years, he was the company's #1 salesperson. He has been promoted twice in the last three years and is now the #1 regional vice president in the country. Go figure.

David and the company we placed him with got *lucky*.

## THE ROLE OF LUCK IN HIRING

Most managers won't admit how much of a role luck plays in hiring employees. The world is full of literature that addresses how to eliminate luck in the process of hiring. The best hiring authorities, however, realize that luck plays a huge part in successful hiring. Above all, these managers feel *lucky* about themselves and their hiring.

No matter how good the interviewing, testing, and reference



checking process is, it's very difficult to fully measure grit, character, integrity, sincerity, commitment, passion, or professionalism, as well as the lack of any of these traits. We might think we're able to detect some of these qualities in a candidate when they're interviewing, but there's no way of realizing their full impact on the person until we actually hire them. How many of us see the people we work with in the same light as we saw them when they interviewed? Interviewing is a staged, contrived event, and in our hearts we know that, at best, it might give us an indication of how the candidate is going to perform

The average hiring process only involves four hours of face-to-face meetings and, at best, an hour or two of testing, paperwork, reference and credit checks, and other tasks. In spite of good intentions, there's simply no real way of knowing exactly what a potential employee is going to be like. Our files are full of stories of people who have far exceeded the expectations of the people with whom we placed them. We're also sure that there were many hired with high expectations that turned out to be mediocre. It's luck.

There's no way of predicting when even a less than average employee is going to be in the right organization, take on the responsibility of the family, and catch fire out of need to provide for them. Who knows when people find the right environment, are around the right people, discover their talent, find the right mentor, and turn their life around to be rock stars? Who knows when the right teacher/mentor appears in a person's life just at the right time and place to help them tap into the latent talent they may possess? Who knows when someone is going to have an epiphany or insight into all of the mistakes they've made and take advantage of what they've learned? Ask any group of experienced



senior managers about their experience along this line and they'll also recount to you their experiences with people who were going to be their future leaders, stellar new hires who flopped, were fired, or what's worse, embezzled or cheated. It's luck.

The best hiring authorities realize that there's a lot of luck in the hiring process. It's often their timing and the right timing for the new employee. Most inexperienced managers will talk about their expectations about their new hires *before* they start work. The best hiring authorities devote a focused, concerted effort in interviewing and hiring and reserve judgment about their decision until they see the new employee perform. They will hope and be quietly optimistic about the potential and future of the new employee . . . until they see performance. They know a large part of it's luck.

*Lucky* (and experienced) hiring authorities consider themselves lucky and look for opportunities to *get lucky* with the people they hire. They have high energy levels and seek candidates with the same energy. They interview a high number of candidates to increase their probability of being lucky. They increase their chances.

The lucky hiring authorities have high expectations for themselves and for those they hire. They expect good things, good people, and a good future. They are realistic about their judgments and always hopeful for the best.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING A MENTOR AND A SAVIOR

The best hiring authorities, however, know that they can have *bad* luck when it comes to hiring. They are objective and realistic about the chances they take with candidates. They realize that



some candidates who present great “risk” factors may also turn out to be great performers. The best hiring authorities, however, know the difference between being a good mentor and a Savior. They realized that the odds of them “saving” a once-successful candidate who has messed up their career isn’t very great. Average hiring authorities have a tendency to think that they are such good leaders they can “save” even the most wayward candidate. There’s a big difference between being a good mentor and a Savior.

Saviors have the idea that they can “teach a pig to sing.” They have an idea (or illusion) that they can help people to become what they really can never be. What’s worse is they hang on to a failing employee way too long, praying for a miracle that never happens. They don’t want to give up on their project, thinking that doing so communicates lack of persistence and acceptance of failure. Eventually everyone, including the employee, comes to the conclusion that salvation isn’t coming. The candidate either gets fired or quietly quits.

Good mentors, on the other hand, may set stringent schedules and clear objectives for apparently talented employees who have had no discipline or have failed before but have demonstrated potential. They put this kind of candidate on a “short string,” informing them of exactly what’s expected and then monitoring the employee’s activities very carefully. They set very high objectives and measurable standards for this kind of employee; then they have no hesitation in deciding very quickly when they are not met and when the employee isn’t going to make it. In other words, they fail quickly.

The best hiring authorities also follow their *gut*. They verify what they feel in their gut about hiring, but don’t hesitate to *fix* a mistake in hiring by following their gut and firing when they first get the inkling.