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When selecting your partners, employees, friends, or mate, what do you look for? When considering offers of employment or building new friendships, do you have specific criteria in mind? Do you follow a selection profile when recruiting or being recruited?

Having a definitive selection profile is almost impossible as there are thousands of attributes used to describe the people you might want to hire or spend time with. People can be honest or dishonest. They can be happy or sad. They can have extensive or limited experience. They can be a subject matter expert or incompetent. They can be organized, disorganized, anxious, calm, confident, insecure, or about anything else you can think of.

Complicating that which is nearly impossible, attributes used to describe people are often more states than traits. They are a reflection of what someone did in the past or does now more than what they can do in the future. Even skills with significant heritability can change over time.

If most attributes are states rather than traits, what attributes are traits? More importantly, what traits are most relevant to consider when selecting someone? Intelligence? Compassion? Conscientiousness? Loyalty? Yes, these are relevant, but perhaps secondary to a more fundamental trait – a person’s eagerness and ability to develop.

You may be thinking “how could an ability to learn a skill be more important than possessing the skill itself?” Consider what happens when one spouse grows over many years of marriage, but the other doesn’t. Or when an organization transforms its business model, but an employee can’t let go of the old one. Or when an old college friend never grows up. A person’s current knowledge, skills, attitude, physical abilities, and good looks are only a snapshot in time. They are short-term qualities that only matter now. What matters most over time is a person’s ability to continue to learn, grow, adapt, and take care of themselves. What people currently know and do isn’t as important as what they can learn and do in the future. If there is one universal trait that best predicts future success, it is people’s ability to develop. It is the ability to embrace change, learn (particularly from adversity), and continually grow.

A person’s core values and guiding principles may not change much over time, but circumstances do. People must learn to use new technology. People must work for new bosses and embrace company reorganizations. New methods must be used as old ones become obsolete. Equipment becomes outdated and gets replaced with equipment with new features. Old products are refreshed and new ones created. Habits, people, processes, systems, partners, and businesses come and go. Life is full of endings and new beginnings. Seasons and chapters end. Relationships, businesses, and economies depend on continuous growth. In an ever-changing world, once change and growth stops, obsolescence starts. Therefore, nothing is more important over the long-term than the ability to learn, grow, and adapt.

An inability to change and grow derails careers, destroys relationships, and reduces longevity. People fail at their diets, marriages, friendships, jobs, and other goals because they lack the will and skill of development. They don’t learn new behaviors. They prefer complacency, contentment, and being stuck in their ways. In contrast, people who are teachable, quick to learn, resilient, adaptable, curious, open-minded, and eager to put their learning into practice are the most successful over time.



The #1 Criteria When Recruiting, Interviewing, or Selecting a Mate

If you aspire to be the best you can be and continuously improve, or to recruit and be with others who continuously improve, consider these principles:

- **Adopt a learning mindset** – View self-development as a lifelong journey. Don't use past successes as a reason to keep doing what you've always done.
- **Seek feedback** – Ask for feedback on what you do well and not do so well. Inquire about what you could do even better than you do now.
- **Be open-minded** – Be open to new ideas and ways of thinking. Accept that most anything can be improved upon. Challenge the status-quo.
- **Take responsibility** – If something isn't going well, take responsibility for improving it. Intercept any tendency to blame someone or something else.
- **Try new experiences** – Look for assignments and experiences that take you out of your comfort zone. Accept opportunities to be challenged.
- **Set learning and development goals** – Create goals and documented development plans that emphasize learning activities that help you track progress.
- **Make time for learning** – Don't merely live life on the treadmill of "busyness as usual." Set aside time for reading, training, creating, studying, and practicing.
- **Allow time for reflection** - Everyone has experiences, but not everyone learns from them. Take time to reflect on your setbacks and accomplishments.
- **Embrace adversity** – Learn from life's challenges and mistakes. Struggles and difficulties are great teachers if you use them for growth instead of defeat.
- **Apply knowledge** – Don't let learning be an academic exercise. Apply yourself. Practice. Contribute. Teach. Coach. Help others.

People can change, but that doesn't mean they will. Many people become stagnant making their lives and other's difficult. Be wary of hiring, working with, and spending time with people who are close-minded, quick to blame others, are unwilling to try new experiences, don't value feedback, don't make time for learning, and don't handle adversity well. Instead, choose to be and spend time with lifelong learners who continually develop themselves.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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