

# Top 5 Signs That New Hire Will Be a Rock-Star Employee

What do I look for in a stellar new hire? Here are the key signs of a rock-star employee.

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"What do you look for in an employee?"

It's a question I get a lot in general, but particularly this time of year, as another cohort of college students hopes to graduate from "intern candidate" to "full-time employee."

Although it's easy to unpack the standard basket of bromides--and although there are obviously practical boxes to be checked relative to training, aptitude, and skills for any specific position--I prefer to answer a nobler question:

*What does it take to become a rock-star employee?*

What does it take to become indispensable to an organization? To be on a shortlist of its most valued employees? To be one of the real difference makers?

Over the course of my career, I've been blessed to work with more than my fair share of rock stars--as superiors, peers, and employees alike. Here are five attributes that they all had in common--and five ways to help increase your personal odds of achieving rock-star status.

**1. Integrity.** That's a big word, and an overused one at that--so allow me to parse it into two specific meanings. First, integrity of thought--the capacity and willingness to bring a unique perspective to the table.

In the words of an old boss, do you "own your own brain"? In my experience, rock-star employees are strong minded, fiercely curious, and tenacious problem solvers--a tremendously valuable trifecta for any employer willing to listen.

Second, integrity of action--do you do what you say? Walk your talk? Keep your promises? In the words of one of our agency's leaders, "When we're heading into battle, these are the people I want in the trench beside me."

**2. Proven ability to get things done.** In their now-famous deck explaining how they shaped culture and motivated performance at Netflix ("Netflix Culture: Freedom and Responsibility"), the authors debunked what I believe to be a huge falsehood that is held by newbies and veterans

alike: that there is a correlation between quantity of hours worked and perceived value to an organization.

Though I appreciate long, hard work, I celebrate outcomes. People who get things done, consistently, efficiently, and effectively. Employees who help corners get turned and put finish lines in the rearview mirror, and do so in a manner consistent with the organization's values.

And so: Don't tally up late nights and weekends; rather, put progress on the scoreboard. Be the uniter, the collaborator, the completer.

**3. Low drama.** So, gut-check time. Be your own boss for a moment. Do you carry a black cloud around with you? Do you spend your time behind closed doors, complaining and judging, assuming the worst and casting aspersions? Do you create unnecessary conflict and drama? How taxing are you--emotionally--to your organization?

In her book *The Reality-Based Rule of the Workplace*, Cy Wakeman suggests a formula that attempts to quantify the value employees provide to their employers. Here it is: "Your Value = Current Performance + Future Potential--3x Emotional Expensiveness."

Yes, you read that right--your emotional expensiveness has a tasty little "3x" tagged in front of it. So although we're all human, with our good and bad days alike, consider what you can do to minimize your destructive behaviors. Because like it or not, it adds up (fast).

**4. No surprises.** Yes, changes happen. And yes, control is an illusion. I get it. But in my experience, rock-star employees see around corners. They are looking two, maybe three turns ahead in the racecourse that is modern-day business.

So, why do I hate surprises, particularly those that can easily be avoided? Because they jam up operations. They gum up the wheels of commerce. And they can take companies (and employers) out of playing offense and into defense (and even paralysis).

As I am famous for saying in our agency's four walls, "Worry in advance." Think a day, a week, a month, even a quarter ahead. Make plans for likely and possible contingencies. Communicate clearly and frequently. And put your team in a position to thrive.

**5. Passion.** Formula One driver Michael Schumacher said, "Once something is a passion, the motivation is there." Indeed. And when an employee brings genuine passion to his or her job, it can have a potent, multiplying effect for the staff--magical, transformative, and dynamic.

So, after 20 years of working with some true rock stars, that's my list of the key attributes that put them in the spotlight. What's yours?