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Guest Opinion: 'Square Pegs' Can Bring Edge to a Company

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By: [Peter Feinstein](#)

Second-chance hires offer experience, perspective and loyalty.

A sad outgrowth from the rise of E-mail and the Internet is that hiring has become a dehumanizing process. "Hiring?" one might ask, "Why even talk about hiring in this awful business climate?"



Peter Feinstein

Well, when it comes to hiring, I am a strong believer in keeping an open mind about a person's value and worth, no matter the business climate. As the job market moved online, the ability to apply for a position with the click of a mouse spurred an exponential increase in applications. Evaluating candidates has become an exercise in elimination — rather than selection — in order to winnow the pool to a manageable size. Thus, the focus has moved to the abstract job requirements — finding the peg that best fits the hole.

This is exacerbated in lean economic times, when cost-conscious businesses try to reduce everything to a number. Many companies estimate the bottom-line value of each position with an eye toward staffing it as cheaply as possible. Counter-intuitively, this puts a premium on younger, less-experienced job candidates.

I advocate a contrarian approach: Trust your intuition and find the best person — no matter their circumstances.

Taking the time to consider each individual has served me well. When resumes are similar, I talk with each person, listening for qualities that will separate certain applicants from the others. When I find a person who will bring something special to the agency, I make room because his or her value and worth makes us better — better for our clients, our media partners, and, ultimately, everyone on staff. I have had success hiring these "square pegs" — folks whose knowledge and skills make them particularly valuable to my business.

It seems like there is a stigma attached to people whose careers haven't followed a "normal" path. Conventional thinking goes like this: *There must be something wrong with them.* And even if there's not, they will want too much money, or will challenge the existing order in the organization. I successfully combat unguided conventional thinking with reliance on my intuition.

Identifying 'Passionate Professionals'

What I've found is that caring individuals looking to make a contribution, whom I refer to as passionate professionals, often have a depth and diversity of experience that sets them apart from the average job seeker, as well as a passion for seeing a job through to its successful conclusion. Downsizing has flooded the job market with such people. They often are stymied, however, by their very uniqueness.

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Truth is, there are many reasons an otherwise promising career can go off track. In addition to downsizing, how about career change, family or health issues, or relocation? People who can overcome such situations and bounce back — an accomplishment in itself — deserve compassionate and respectful consideration.

The fact that a passionate professional has been off the radar can have nothing to do with his or her knowledge or ability. In fact, those folks often bring more to the table. They can be more knowledgeable, bring a wider range of connections and are more likely to see the big picture and offer fresh perspectives.

Most passionate professionals, in my experience, share another quality as well: loyalty. They remember and appreciate the people who boosted them when they were down. This is where karma enters the equation, since we all know how much business is based upon personal relationships.

I experienced this recently when the effects of the economy forced me to temporarily cut some of our costs. After I explained the situation to each person on staff in separate, one-on-one meetings, each agreed to changes in compensation — with the promise that, as the company's cash flow and profitability improved, each would be justly compensated.

In return, I've been able to create a profit-sharing pool so that everyone will benefit from the company's success. Everyone wins, which is what business, and business ownership, is all about.

My point, then, is that the pool of job candidates always contains a few diamonds in the rough. Call them what you will — career changers, square pegs, second chancers — but judge them as complete human beings, not numbers.

Peter Feinstein is president and chief executive officer of Phoenix-based Higher Power Marketing. Reach him with questions or comments at (888) 501-5544 or via E-mail at pf@hpowermarketing.com.

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