

Elon Musk's brilliant hiring strategy: how Tesla and SpaceX discover top talent

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FULL TEXT

Elon Musk is known for debunking traditional education as a means to get and find the best talent. For him, "college is basically for fun and not for learning." The entrepreneur argues that skills matter more than degrees. That's why his companies, Tesla and SpaceX, attract and retain bright minds without the need for a degree. According to Inc.com columnist Kelly Main, the hiring process requires two things, which boil down to one: the "Two-Handed Test."

What the "Two-Handed Test" does is screen candidates without traditional gatekeepers, such as degrees. Instead, it qualifies them through first-hand experience and practical knowledge testing. It's a simple method that was created so that any company can use it to find top talent.

1. First-hand experience

For Musk, experience is a form of education. And in many ways, it's the best education. In fact, a report from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), cited by columnist Kelly Main, inadvertently proves the entrepreneur's theory.

The AACU study states that three-quarters of employee hiring managers believe a college education is essential. However, the reason was not based on a specific curriculum, but on the acquired "soft skills" that college is said to confer. These same soft skills (i.e., creativity, emotional intelligence, or resilience) are difficult to assess in an interview, and whose development is not isolated to college or student life, but to real-life experiences.

In other words, education is not limited to what is taught in the classroom, but to what is learned through first-hand experience. And so, first-hand experience is sought as a means of discovering talents with deep insights. For example, when reviewing applications, consider which candidates have the necessary first-hand experience or at least require the least amount of training to be successful in the position.

2. Hands-on testing

Elon Musk has a history of applying engineering processes and strategies to other facets of his business, and his life. So much so, that it's the reason the billionaire lives in a tiny \$50,000 house.

A job interview is a test that, rather than really examining a candidate's capabilities, many companies simply assess their knowledge. For Musk, according to Kelly Main, this is a fatal flaw, as there is a big difference between memorizing and parroting information and actually understanding how something works.

To test candidates effectively, you need to offer them tests (e.g., a task or assignment) that are as close as possible to what the job itself may encounter. To get an accurate measure of one's ability to effectively perform the job tasks, make sure that the scope of the test is limited to the resources needed to perform the test or task. The hiring process can be long and tiring. That's why the faster you can narrow down candidates, the sooner you can interview, conduct practical tests and discover the best talent in the world. According to Main, preparing companies for the future means not only finding quirky and effective ways to retain staff, but also having an effective recruitment strategy to attract and discover new employees efficiently so that the business can function.

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