

**STYBEL
PEABODY &
ASSOCIATES, INC.**



Laurence Stybel, Ed.D., and Maryanne Peabody, MBA, founded Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

**ASK THIS QUESTION WHEN
SEEKING TO RECRUIT TALENT
TO HELP YOUR COMPANY'S
GROWTH/TRANSFORMATION
JOURNEY.**

The [Big Five Personality](#) Factors are a well-researched and effective framework to examine normal personality functioning. The core Big Five factors are:

- [Introversion](#) (high to low)
- [Openness](#) to New Experiences (high to low)
- [Agreeableness](#) (high to low low)
- [Neuroticism-Creativity](#) (high to low)
- [Conscientiousness](#) (high to low)

In this article, we will focus on how hiring authorities can use the Big Five Personality Factors as a framework for hiring.

Openness to New Ideas

In an earlier article, we discussed Conscientiousness as THE most important factor to consider when making hiring decisions.

It is rare to find an experienced hiring executive who cannot come up with at least one horror story involving hiring a candidate with excellent academic credentials and great job interview skills yet low on conscientiousness.

The reason such horror stories are so common is that employers assume that the U.S. education system weeds out students who are low on conscientiousness.

“You have to be highly conscientious to have gotten a degree from this university.”

That assumption may not be valid.

Do not assume conscientiousness is proven by having a degree. Check out conscientiousness by asking references to illustrate stories they remember. Psychological testing may also help.

In this article we want to focus on the second most important Big Five personality trait: Openness to New Ideas.

This personality trait is critical for companies seeking to grow or transform.

Use LinkedIn Before the Candidate Meeting.

Before meeting a candidate for the first time, is it possible to speak with people you know who might know the person? LinkedIn is an excellent resource for identifying such people.

Ask for time to speak on the phone. Below is a suggested question:

“On a scale of 0 (never) to 10 (always), give me a number that reflects how open this person is to new ideas?”

Once a number is given, ask the person to explain why that number was assigned.

Before meeting the candidate, do a Google search to find out if the candidate writes blogs. Do the topics focus on expansion, growth, and new ideas? That suggests high openness to new ideas.

Perhaps the blogs focus on reduction of risk/uncertainty. That might suggest low openness to new ideas.

Targeting Your Communication

Once you have gotten a sense of the candidate’s openness to new ideas, evaluate YOUR openness to new ideas.

Of course, you may think you are highly open to new ideas.

Would those who work with you agree with you?

If an outside professional called them and promised them confidentiality, how would they respond to this question?

“On a scale of 0 (never) to 10 (always), give me a number that reflects how open X is to new ideas?”

Your willingness to subject yourself to such a survey and then reveal the data to a desired candidate might be your best way of getting a highly open to new ideas candidate interested in joining your team.

And your low number gives you an idea of what you need to work on.

Structuring the Employment Interview

If your candidate is open to new ideas and you are open to new ideas, then there is a good match. The following interview questions will help confirm this person's openness to new ideas:

“Tell me a story about a time when you questioned the commonly accepted wisdom at your company or team?”

Since we are dealing with personality factors, it is acceptable if the person does not use a business example but talks about sports or family issues.

If you want to get this candidate interested in joining your organization, be ready to sprinkle words like “change,” “growth,” “innovation,” “new,” and “exciting.”

Suppose You Want Low Openness to New Ideas

A company culture may be one of growth and transformation, but you may be managing a function within the business that requires consistency, reliability, and predictability:

Audit function within a life science company

Compliance function within a hedge fund

Quality function within a manufacturing company.

In this situation, you want to bring in talent high on Conscientiousness but relatively low on Open to New Ideas.

People low on Openness to New Ideas treasure consistency, reliability and predictability. People high on Openness to New Ideas might find

the work they do boring. They will get impatient with the lack of challenge and leave your team.

Below is a question you might ask during the employment interview:

“Tell me a story about a situation that began in chaos, but you helped it become orderly.”

Use attractive words like “stabilize,” “control,” “predict,” “measure,” “consistency.”

If your candidate is relatively closed to new ideas and you are relatively open to new ideas, there is going to be a conflict.

Using the Big Five in Sales

This Big Five framework focusing on Openness to New Ideas can also be used as a sales tool. For example:

You are a relatively open-to-new-ideas account manager seeking to sell a medical device to two different radiologists in two different physician practice groups. Radiologist #1 is relatively closed to new experiences and wants to hear about predictability, reliability, and total cost of ownership over a three-year period.

Use words that excite Radiologist #1 and not necessarily the words that excite you.

In your research about Radiologist #2, however, you discover that she has a record of publications in esteemed medical journals and has a faculty appointment at a local medical school.

This person might be more influenced by your pointing out product uniqueness, and how having an instrument like this could be an incentive for young radiologists she wishes to attract.

Summary and Conclusions

The Big Five Personality Factor framework as a well-researched framework to look at personality factors of high functioning “normal” adults.

Whether you are seeking to sell a product to a customer or an employment opportunity to a candidate, use the Big Five to select the words you use in conversation and the questions you ask.

If your mission is to grow or transform a business, be clear about the importance of hiring people who are Open to New Ideas.

Companies make a mistake in placing too much emphasis on hiring people with certain academic credentials or years of relevant industry experience. This emphasis often comes at the expense of not paying enough attention on personality/culture fit.

In 3-6 months, most candidates will learn enough about your industry to do the job at a fully competent level.

Skills can be learned.

It is far more effective to hire the right personality type at the front end than to hire the wrong personality type and spend time/money on trying to change it.

References

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Stybel Peabody provides companies with “leadership and career success” for valued senior level talent. Core services include retained search (Board members, CEOs, COOs, CFOs), leadership development coaching, and executive-level outplacement.

For a free 30-minute consult, contact:

Laurence J. Stybel, Ed.D.

Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

lstybel@stybelpeabody.com

stybelpeabody.com

boardoptions.com