

Recruiting in the 21st Century – Who's your best draft pick?

Human Capital Recruitment 101. Succession Planning Level 2. Revenue development, - the key to increased revenue and team value.

Wouldn't it be great to have a recruitment tool like the NFL combine and subsequent draft? This week starts a three-day marathon selection process run by the NFL to select the next crop of superstars. This 'recruitment process' is one of the purest forms of talent review and selection and most of it is on public display for everyone to watch. What can we learn from the process they use? – A lot!!!

We here in Pittsburgh have been blessed for two generations now because of a set of family values that we've watched live for many years. The Rooney Family, led by our recently deceased owner Dan Rooney, has always been a beacon of light in an otherwise tumultuous industry. At his funeral last week as part of his eulogy one of the greatest compliments was paid him – he was a Pittsburgher. Family centered, religious, a man of integrity, quiet – and certainly not boastful – someone who would rather have let the body of work he developed and emulated from his father, speak for who he was. He was a Pittsburgher, if you must ask you'll never understand. But this family created a unique selection process as part of evaluating talent for this iconic team that has withstood the test of time.

Besides the physical tests, the normal process in the NFL is that every candidate are run through a series of assessments, both aptitude and personality tests. The teams want to know a little more about the individual than just what they can do in pads. Every individual is tested for illegal drug use. If someone is cheating about their performance by using illegal drugs, what else are the cheating about??? Background checks. The last thing a team wants to do is give a player some kind of huge signing bonus only to realize that that player is on their way to jail for something. How are you going to get that money back??? Then there's the actual capability evaluation. Players are interviewed by dozens of teams and coaches and that grilling isn't anything different than some of the interviews any of us may have been through

Next, there is a critical review of the performance of each player who has declared. Although this is mostly done via the NFL Combine, some schools hold their own scouting days. In each case the top talent recruiters are evaluating the players based on their resume of accomplishments, but also on their actual live performance. Kind of a panel interview of sorts where the candidates get to actually demonstrate their skills. Think of a computer programmer, or a graphic artist who can either code live, or present an entire collection of their work. Most players at this level have had professional highlight tapes prepared for the recruiters, and, as we all know, almost everything is available online today. But that's only what you can see on the surface. Truth is, most of the top draft picks really don't ever fully live up to their hype. In fact, the greatest players across the entire history of the sport were players picked in the middle to late rounds. Why? It's what we like to call at Human Capital Advisors – the Performance Factors – those soft skills that everyone ignores, or generally give second attention to.

So What makes the difference? Intangibles like work ethic, learning capacity, coachability, and, here's one, character. If you look at the teams who consistently perform at the top of this sport, the owners set the tone on who they're going to draft, and who they are going to tolerate. Our beloved Steelers are notorious for quickly jettisoning a player who in any way puts themselves above the team, or worse, tarnishes the name of the team by getting involved in some public scandal. There are a few exceptions, but in general this is a team that is built around core values as well as core competencies.

Finally, why else is the draft so important? It's called Succession Planning. This is a brutal sport, although I've seen some highly political companies whose office politics make the NFL look like high school. We'll save that for another day. But, as this sport is physically very, very punishing, the average career of any player is only a few years, certainly less than ten. As such teams that are consistently successful year after year are always thinking of their succession plan. Who can we find and have as part of our team that can fulfill that critical role – IF – that current performer cannot go. Teams nor companies can absolutely predict which player is going to get hurt, and as a result need at least one backup in every position. Think about each position in your company – is there a backup ready to step in if something happens to the starter?

So, sit back, enjoy the draft, watch a couple of hockey games with the family, and when you get back to work on Monday ask yourself - How important are your core values in your selection process for any new employee you want to join your team? I guess it depends on whether your employees are assets or commodities. In a world with a rapidly shrinking availability of qualified talent, those that consider their employee's assets are positioned to win on the competitive landscape. If that's not part of your process I suggest you're in trouble. If it is, and you truly use it as part of your selection criteria, you and your organization are much more likely to experience success in both the short and more importantly – long run.

I wish you well,

Dave