

Hiring Geospatial Employees



Are you looking to change your job during the year? Or maybe you're looking to recruit and will be part of the hiring process. Adena Schutzberg provides some timely advice drawn from a master of successful appointments who uses heuristics.

Over the last 20 years I've probably read several hundred requests from students, career changers and those already involved in geospatial technology asking for help getting a job. In contrast, I've read very little about how to hire the best people from those groups. Luckily Henry Ward, CEO at eShares, detailed his four hiring principles and six hiring heuristics in a post on Medium. In this column, I want to share how his heuristics ("hiring rules") might inform the way geospatial jobseekers present themselves.

Strength vs Lack of Weakness

The vast majority of geospatial employers want their recruitment ads to include a laundry list of required or preferred skills such as the use of software packages, programming in a variety of languages and administering a handful of databases. Employers feel it's very efficient and cost-effective to hire these "jacks of all trades."

Ward sees it differently. He believes the interview process is about finding the employee's few key strengths. With that short list in hand, he argues, the company can be confident the individual can be great at other things. If a candidate is a great C++ programmer there's no reason that, with training, she can't also be a great Python programmer.

Takeaway: The jobseeker might focus on one or two strengths rather than presenting herself as a generalist.

Trajectory vs Experience

Trajectory is the path an employee will take, while experience is what he's already done. Interviews focus on experience because it's easy to explore. Further, a hiring manager can feel confident a new employee can immediately use QGIS to manage an electrical network if he did it for a previous employer.

The real investment, says Ward, is in the future of the hiree rather than his current value. How can the hiring manager identify an individual with a great trajectory? The "tell" is that the individual gets more excited when talking about what he will do rather than discussing past accomplishments.

Takeaway: The job seeker should have thought about an exciting future project and be prepared to describe it.

Doers vs Tellers

The interview process typically includes one or more conversations. These may indicate the candidate is a good communicator, but not actually a good worker. That's why Ward and other hiring managers have interviewees "do something." It might be a puzzle or a code challenge or a GIS data edit such as splitting a parcel.

Takeaway: Job seekers should come prepared to "do something" during the interview. Bring a laptop with familiar GIS software to show what you can do.

Learners vs Experts

It's easy to describe oneself as an "ArcGIS Desktop Expert" or cite an Esri certification on a résumé. But what may be even more important is the ability to roll with the punches when the next iteration of the software or a new package comes along. Hiring managers want to find those who are curious, anxious to learn and actually know how to learn.

Takeaway: Job seekers should come prepared to identify a skill (GIS related or otherwise) they needed to learn and how they learned it.

Different vs Similar

Most managers are comfortable hiring individuals like themselves. This, says Ward, is a bad idea. Hiring the same people over and over creates cultural stagnation and the company cannot grow. Hiring staff with different opinions and outlooks challenges, stretches, and freshens the culture.

Takeaway: Job seekers should seek opportunities to show that they are not exactly like the interviewers by highlighting different perspectives, experiences and knowledge areas.

Always Pass on Ego

Ward gets right to it: “The truly confident don’t need people to know they are great. They are happy to know it themselves.” The less confident, he explains, will continually talk about their greatness and prompt competitive arms races within the company. Candidates with big egos should be turned away.

Takeaway: Job seekers should include awards and experiences on their résumés but tread carefully when discussing them during the interview.

Prepare with Care

I believe these six heuristics are valuable to consider when interviewing anywhere. Use them to explore whether you are a fit for a position and if so, how to prepare to be impressive at the interview.

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