

Tools

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The mindset revolution

In a new book, recruitment supremo James Reed challenges the emphasis on skills in the job market, arguing that other, more fundamental qualities are more important. Here he describes how he reached his conclusion and what those winning qualities are



Neil Webb

The mindset revolution began back in the dark days of the autumn of 2008. Lehman Brothers had recently collapsed and it seemed that the job market might follow — which was especially

critical to me, as I run Reed, the global recruitment company. London felt dark and frost-bound as I made my way to a summit meeting on "the future of skills". Not the most inspiring time or place, you might think, to spark a wake-up call that will have a transformational affect on the way we all recruit.

Skills become obsolete, even worthless, more quickly now than ever before, as Lucy Adams, one of the lead speakers, explained. "The trouble is," she said, "we don't know which skills will be most in demand in ten years' time." That is when it dawned on me. No, I thought, I cannot possibly know which skills will be most in demand in ten years' time. The skills I look for in recruits now are often completely different to the ones I looked for only a decade ago. But I do know exactly what kind of people I will want to hire in ten years' time. The underlying qualities that I seek as an employer are the ones that characterise someone's fundamental mindset and these won't change.

At the start, this thought raised more questions than it answered. Did other employers, beside myself, believe there was something more important to them than skills? What difference might this realisation make to business success and, crucially, to individuals looking for their next career move? And what was the winning mindset, what did it look like and consist of?

It was then that I started discussing these questions with my friend, Dr Paul G Stoltz, whose cutting-edge work on resilience and how adversity can be harnessed to fuel personal and professional advance already fascinated me. But he too recognised that just as skills were not sufficient, nor was resilience alone. As we began to talk more, the idea for a completely new — and joint — project began to develop.

We decided to ask thousands of top employers across Europe, Asia and the Americas what they really look for in employees. We also initiated in-depth interviews, group workshops and a groundbreaking study analysing more than 30,000 CVs to find robust, new answers to our questions. These answers will have profound implications for both recruiters and job seekers.

Given the choice between someone with the desired mindset who lacks the complete skillset for the job, and someone with the complete skillset who lacks the desired mindset, a total of 96 per cent of the employers surveyed picked mindset over skillset as the key element in those they seek and retain. When asked which is more likely, a person with the right skillset developing the desired mindset, or a person with the desired mindset developing the right skillset, 98 per cent of employers chose the latter. And 97 per cent of employers felt more confident predicting the mindset of the people they'll be hiring in five to ten years rather than the required skillset.

We were astonished by the strength of these results. They totally undermine one of the central tenets of the job world: that better skills equal better jobs. Instead, they flip the whole career» advice model on its head. The new truth: focus on mindset, and the rest will take care

of itself.

Mindset utterly trumps skillset, yet when we ask employers how they currently assess mindset in the people they hire, they tend to pause, laugh nervously, or mumble an answer that isn't a real answer. In reality, they come up blank. And when we ask them how important it would be to them to have job candidates and employees who could demonstrate, even prove their mindsets, that is when we repeatedly hear employers exclaim, "That would be fantastic," "That's always been the missing piece," and even, "Mindset is everything".

We asked employers, "What if your job candidates had some way to prove their mindset? What would you think of that?" Industry by industry, leader by leader, their answer was the same. In the words of Steve Collins, senior sales director for Mars, "It would be game-changing."

Top companies around the world said that employees with the right mindset were, on average, seven times more valuable to them than employees with all the skills but not the vital mindset qualities that made the difference. Such a multiple is vast, in economic terms. When put on the spot, employers had clear ideas about what mindset qualities make the difference to them. So imagine taking all the top mindset ingredients top employers say make the biggest difference, pressure testing them to see how they hold up, and then pouring them into a giant sorting machine. That is essentially what we have done to arrive at what we call the 3G Mindset.

In one study, for instance, we asked more than 800 employers across all industries what they meant by mindset. More specifically, which mindset qualities or elements do they value most in the people they hire and retain? Based on our prior research, we gave them an exhaustive menu from which to choose, as well as the option to add anything we might have omitted. We forced them to rate each element as essential, desirable or not important.

What struck us was not which qualities people chose but rather how consistent the lists were across industries, countries and cultures. Mindset is both universal and timeless. This means — unlike skillset — that if you master it, you can take it anywhere and use it forever.

Honesty and trustworthiness tied for first place, with 100 per cent of employers marking them as essential or desirable. Not a single employer said that these qualities were not important, and more than 90 per cent said they were essential. Commitment, adaptability, accountability and flexibility all followed closely behind. This means that if you can master just these six as a starting point, your value to employers grows dramatically.

As we undertook further analysis, we began to see that different traits grouped naturally into three fundamental categories. In our employers' top six, for instance, adaptability and flexibility seem to fall into one group, honesty and trustworthiness into another, while commitment and

accountability largely belong to a third. These three areas provide a logical, accessible and memorable framework that includes all the key mindset ingredients.

We have called these the three 'Gs', which stand for Global Mindset, Good Mindset, and Grit Mindset. Together, they add up to the 3G Mindset, a distillation of all the most important mindset qualities that employers seek:

Global The vantage point of your 3G Mindset. It is about openness to new experiences and new ideas, as well as the ability to make new connections and to create new combinations.

Good The bedrock of your 3G Mindset. It is about seeing and approaching the world in a way that truly benefits those around you.

Grit The fuel cell of your 3G Mindset. It spurs you on when others give up and gives you the grip you need to forge ahead.

We have developed a tool for assessing and gauging your 3G Mindset called the 3G Panorama™. This assessment scores you on each aspect of your 3G Mindset and gives you immediate feedback on your areas of strength and weakness. And there is a whole range of extra resources to go with the 3G Panorama, with new tools, tips, tests, and practical exercises, all available online at 3GMindset.com. These will help you not only to measurably improve your 3G Mindset, but also to learn how to demonstrate your mindset qualities to your current or a future employer.

Ultimately, developing a winning 3G Mindset is not any kind of glib, instant fix, but a deep and fundamental shift in approach. All the evidence suggests that such a shift is certainly worthwhile. When you optimise your 3G Mindset, you dramatically increase your chances of becoming the most readily promoted, most stubbornly retained and most prized member of your workforce.

Through our research, we have also discovered that evidencing a 3G Mindset makes a powerful difference to a jobseeker's prospects. In fact, doing so at least triples their chances of winning the job.

There is no time like the present to "put your mindset to work".

Put Your Mindset to Work by James Reed and Dr Paul G Stoltz is published by Portfolio/Penguin, £12.99. Visit 3GMindset.com to access the 3G Panorama and other tools designed to help you strengthen your mindset
