

# HOW TO HIRE GREAT LEADERS: PART II

By Marlys Hanson

## **THE PAST IS PREDICTIVE OF THE FUTURE**

Hiring your next CEO (CFO, VP Sales & Marketing, etc.) does not have to be a “roll of the dice”! (See How to Hire Great Leaders - Part I) *It is possible to predict how a candidate will or will not perform leadership responsibilities.*

Using a process called SIMA®, (System for Identifying Motivated Abilities), trained analysts can examine achievements that candidates have selected from their life/work as *most enjoyable and satisfying*. For the trained eye and ear, the recurring evidence found in the candidate’s *past performance* provides evidence on which to base predictions of their *future performance*.

While a SIMA® analyst is obviously more able to recognize important

leadership nuances, all decision-makers can improve their decisions by becoming more aware of the *existence of recurring behavior that literally tells the story of how that person will perform*. Using this evidence of recurring behavior, decision-makers are able to make a more informed (and accurate) decision as to whether or not the candidate is a “fit” for the position.

## **IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP MOTIVATION**

This phenomenon of recurring behavior is best understood by examining an excerpt from actual achievement data provided by a candidate. This candidate, Pat, (not the candidate’s real name) is being considered for a top leadership position in a worldwide retail sales company. Pat has “passed muster” on

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the other criteria for the position (Industry Knowledge and Functional Expertise, defined in How to Hire Great Leaders - Part I). The decision-makers in this selection process have determined that the critical Leadership Motivations for this position are

- **CUSTOMER-FOCUSED**
- **VISIONARY**
- **PROACTIVE**

Provided below are excerpts of an interview with Pat. This interview was conducted by a SIMA® analyst with the purpose of eliciting specific detail on how Pat went about performing the achievements that he has selected from his work/life as being *most enjoyable and satisfying*.

### **EXCERPTS FROM SIMA® ACHIEVEMENT INTERVIEW WITH PAT**

*To help you recognize the evidence for being customer-focused, the relevant comments of the candidate are in italics.*

**1) I successfully managed a sales territory to achieve top 5% in country.** I was responsible for selling equipment to commercial businesses in a defined and protected geographical territory. My quota was made up of financial targets and equipment targets. I organized my days and weeks by balancing cold calls (non-users) with calls on existing customers. On these calls, I used the selling

skills I had learned *to uncover and develop needs with customers*, and ultimately to cultivate the relationship toward a sale. *In many cases, I brought in equipment to show the customer how it worked – and let them try it.* In most cases, a written proposal and quote were required. Good record keeping and organization were important, with time scheduled for follow up calls, next steps, etc. It was very satisfying to develop the relationships, close the sales, hit and exceed the quota, earn the reward trips.

**2) I was asked by the CEO to implement the European Strategy Study, providing recommendations for our future in Europe, following an incident of major fraud by a subsidiary.** Outlining the process, recruiting the team, and conducting the work led to this being one of my most memorable work experiences. I was actually taken out of my job for a 3-month period of time to focus exclusively on the project. I started with interviews and discussions, getting a thorough understanding from senior management of their objectives. Once identified, I developed a project plan and timeline for achieving it. Based on the plan, I recruited a team to assist in the project. I began with meetings in the UK with UK company management to understand their company, review the options, etc. *We scheduled meetings with potential buyers, potential outsource partners, to get full understanding of just what it was the customer wanted.* Same was conducted in Germany. This led to financial analysis, risk assessment as well

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as assessment of customer/sales impact and market considerations. I led the team through the process of synthesizing all the information and narrowed the options down to a single recommendation. I then presented the summary and recommendation to senior management. It resulted in a permanent assignment in Europe. It was particularly satisfying to organize the project, *get to know the real customers, build the relationships of trust with colleagues in Europe who were not enthusiastic about the “American intruders”* and to see the recommendation fully accepted and implemented.

**3) One of my first assignments in my new role in Europe was to expand to new countries/markets – an assignment I gladly took on.** I had full responsibility for overseeing the assessment leading to the approval to establish the legal entity and ultimately commence operations. Essentially I was project managing the development of the program – all aspects including legal/regulatory, operations, systems, finance, product development, sales support, hiring, etc. This also included taking the concept to reality through launch and program growth, and then developing solid, positive relationships with the management team and sales force. *I spent a lot of time listening and responding to potential customers – and saw to it that my team also had plenty of direct contact with the potential customer.* It was particularly satisfying to see the companies operate profitably and positively.

### **IS THIS THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THIS POSITION?**

Clearly, this candidate exhibits strong recurring evidence for being **Customer-Focused**. He makes sure he knows what the customer wants and needs. He has direct interface with the customer. He makes sure that his team also has direct customer interface. He obviously values the customer’s input and relationship.

Now let us examine his achievement data for evidence of being **Visionary** and **Proactive**, the other two Leadership Motivations considered by these decision-makers to be critical criteria for meeting the requirements of the position:

Is there recurring evidence that Pat formulates visions and uses that vision as a mechanism for leadership? No, there is not evidence for visionary motivation in these achievements. Pat’s achievements are all about meeting goals, quotas, and requirements. Difficult and complex as Pat’s achievements are, all of them are directed toward accomplishing a clear requirement or assignment.

Is there recurring evidence that Pat is proactive? Again, we must say there is no recurring evidence for this motivation. Pat’s motivation is triggered by defined quotas, assignments and cues from management.

Obviously, these two Leadership Motivations are NOT a strong part of

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Pat's recurring, motivated leadership behavior. **The bottom line: This insight, which would be critical to his leadership performance in this position, may have never surfaced without a careful examination of the achievements Pat felt were *his most enjoyable and satisfying*.** If these are critical requirements for the position, Pat is not the person for the job, despite all of his other competencies.

### LEARNING “HOW” TO MAKE MORE INFORMED DECISIONS

Boards, CEOs and other hiring decision-makers must recognize that past achievements are predictive of future performance, and that the candidate's achievement data, if properly developed and understood, can provide valuable predictive insight into the candidate's leadership motivation.

While the SIMA® analyst will be best prepared to elicit and interpret the candidate's achievement data, any decision-maker can significantly improve the accuracy of his/her selection decisions by building rudimentary skills for SIMA® interviewing and “fit” analysis.

Presented below are three very important steps in SIMA® Achievement Interviewing© that lead to better “evidence” on which to base your selection decisions:

### STEP ONE: COLLECTING THE CANDIDATE'S ACHIEVEMENT DATA

This first step is critical to gaining predictive insights. As Pat's example above demonstrates, the “pattern” of recurring behavior is established by reviewing *achievements that the candidate selects* from his/her life/work experiences *as most satisfying and rewarding*. Thus, candidates are asked to develop a chronology of these experiences and then to identify their eight most enjoyable/satisfying experiences for further expansion.

### STEP TWO: INTERVIEWING FOR DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS!

The purpose of the SIMA® Achievement Interview© is to elicit details on precisely *what the candidate did* to accomplish this achievement. The key to an effective SIMA® Achievement Interview is to help candidates *tell their story* without “leading the witness.”

Once you learn about SIMA® Achievement Interviewing©, you will recognize *how traditional (especially “targeted”) interviewing leads the candidate into areas of interest to the interviewer, rather than helping the candidate to disclose the details of their “motivated” performance*. For example, the “targeted” interviewer may say “This position requires strong skills in project motivation. What experience do you have in project management?” Whereupon the candidate expounds on whatever s/he knows about project management, regardless of whether they were truly “motivated” to do the work – perhaps they simply did it because it was part of their responsibility. (And we all

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know what a difference that makes!)

In the SIMA® Achievement Interview©, you do not introduce topics that candidate has not introduced. For example, no matter how curious you are about whether this candidate is goal-oriented, you do not ask if he/she sets goals.

This technique requires the skillful use of open-ended questions. (Open-ended questions are those that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no” – and do not offer “multiple choices” from which the responder can select an answer.)

Some examples of open-ended questions that will elicit the kind of action details you need include:

*Tell me about .....*

*How did you know how to do that?*

*Could you give me an example of .....*

*What part of the project did you enjoy the most?*

*What was involved in .....*

*What would you be doing when you were .....*

*What was your role?*

*What would I have seen you doing if I were a fly on the wall?*

*What was most satisfying and enjoyable about that achievement?*

### **STEP THREE: ANALYZING FOR “FIT” TO THE POSITION**

Everyone strives to fulfill his/her “pattern” of motivation in any work/life situation. This recurring behavior thus provides insight into how the person will “fit” the responsibilities of a given

position.

To fully reap the benefits of the SIMA® process, interviewers must prepare themselves by defining what they are seeking to learn from the interview. For example, they should be clear on which of the Leadership Motivations are most critical for performance in this position. While interviewers must not “lead” the candidate into those specific areas, they must also be aware of the “absence” of such motivation when the candidate offers no recurring detailed examples of those leadership motivations.

Obviously, the Interviewer needs to not only listen very carefully to the candidate’s description of his/her actions, but to take notes as well. Here are some clues for listening and note taking:

- Note the *verbs* that s/he uses. Verbs are evidence of specific “motivated” abilities (e.g., I *wrote* a paper, I *organized* the team, I *developed* a proposal)
- Note also the *nouns*. The nouns disclose tell you the nature of the Subject Matter in which the candidate has motivation. (It could be individuals, teams, groups, data, concepts, etc.)
- Record the candidate’s own words. Do not translate or add your own interpretation. After a few interviews, you will be able to recognize key words and phrases that disclose the candidate’s motivation (e.g., *I enjoyed being the center of*

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*attention, I liked seeing the finished product, It was most fun when I was in charge of the activity.)*

- Audio-tape the interview so that you can review the candidate's comments as needed.

### **THE BENEFITS OF MORE INFORMED HIRING DECISIONS**

Selection decisions made with the benefit of the SIMA® process have proven to be more accurate than a “roll of the dice.” By knowing more about what the person seeks as an outcome for his/her efforts, you will be more able to understand how s/he will impact your organization. By examining how the person relates to others in his/her achievements, you can better gauge how their leadership style will fit in your management team. You will learn whether the individual is truly *motivated* to perform the leadership responsibilities required for your position. **Most importantly, the SIMA® Assessment helps you to *predict* how this person will perform in your position.** SIMA® Assessments also result in increased acceptance and retention rates.

### **MARLYS HANSON, M.S.**

Marlys Hanson is a Senior Associate with People Management International, Inc. For 25 years, she has provided “job-fit” products and services to Fortune 100's, top government agencies, and entrepreneurial teams, both domestic and international. Clients include BP, ExxonMobil, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Department of Energy, DuPont and Merck (Australia). Several of her clients have received national awards for excellence in their job-fit management systems. Marlys has received several national awards for her leadership in the profession.

After nearly twenty years of leadership in the Society, Marlys served as National President of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). She has been a frequent conference speaker and radio talk show guest; she has presented hundreds of job-fit workshops for both domestic and international clients. Her book PASSION AND PURPOSE has received outstanding reviews in national publications

Marlys has a M.S. in Counseling Psychology with Distinction and a B. S. in Business Education/Administration awarded Summa Cum Laude.

**SIMA®** is a proprietary and copyrighted assessment system that **PMII** developed in 1961. The system and its many applications have proven to provide invaluable knowledge for thousands of organizations around the world.

If you would like more information on **HOW TO HIRE GREAT LEADERS**, please contact us at [info@peoplemanagement.org](mailto:info@peoplemanagement.org), or Ron Evans, Managing Director, People Management International Inc., at [revans@peoplemanagement.org](mailto:revans@peoplemanagement.org) or 1-860-677-6770