



6 Essential qualities new hires should have





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6 ESSENTIAL QUALITIES

new hires should have

For the majority of studios their most important resources are their employees: the modeler, the rigger, the animator and so on. They are the individuals who make your product and profit come to life, whether you're designing a web page for a client or releasing a feature film. Of course, not all potential hires are created equal, hence the need to interview.

Interviewing applicants takes time, not to mention the resources and cost it takes to train a new hire. There's always ramp up time to fully integrate someone into the production pipeline, learn the company's rules, and get comfortable within the work space. Turnovers that occur because of ill-fits with the company or dissatisfaction only serves to reset this costly process.

To make things more challenging, each year brings a different set of skills, knowledge and personality traits that studios find desirable in new hires. Knowing these qualities can help you lower your investment and increase retention rates. Doing a little work upfront can save you time down the line.

Luckily, there's some consensus among employers about what qualities are most important in a new hire today. For example, recently at SIGGRAPH, Autodesk hosted an educators breakfast where studio presidents, leads and university instructors came together to discuss what types of characteristics are proving valuable in the workplace. The following is a list of some traits you might want to consider before making an offer.

“Having a great work culture doesn’t mean your employees love what they do. It means they love where and who they do it with.”

Cultural fit

As far as qualifications go, a potential hire’s cultural fit is increasingly being seen as equal to, if not more important than, their actual skill level. That’s because many companies are seeing work culture as one of the most effective ways of moving their businesses ahead.

Marc Weiger, President of Method Studios, states that one of the most important characteristics he looks for in a new hire is their sociability, likability and cultural fit.

“Life’s too short to work with assholes,” Weiger explains at the SIGGRAPH panel, “Office politics poison companies. If it’s between two candidates, one highly skilled and the other with a good personality, the second person will usually get the job.”

Having a great work culture doesn’t mean your employees love what they do. It means they love where and who they do it with. Loving what you do is the result of a healthy work culture not the cause of it. It is dependent on each employee maintaining it, so you want someone who can maintain your values, your attitude and your passion.

From an interviewing standpoint, Method’s Studio Manager, Jeff Weiner, believes that one of the most

telling questions you can ask during an interview is the basic “Tell us a little bit about yourself” question. The question is intentionally open-ended so that applicants can feel more comfortable and begin to reveal some of their personality and passion for their work.

Generalist

3D and design schools are continuing to move towards a well-rounded, more generalist education when it comes preparing their students. That’s because studios are asking for artists who have knowledge and experience of the entire pipeline.

“It’s extremely important to have a base knowledge of everything,” Weiger explains, “Even if we look for specific people like say a lighter, I still expect that the guy also knows how to model and so on. It might not be what he’s chosen as a specialty, but he needs to know it. It’s very important.”

Being highly specialized in one area can still be a successful approach to getting work , especially for freelancers. But within a pipeline context, being a generalist can be very beneficial for the studio. For one, generalists can help fill in gaps when absences occur. Another benefit is that the whole line works best when everyone has a clear understanding of how their own

work affects and is affected by the other parts. Such general knowledge helps ensure that oversights are more likely eliminated before work is passed on to other departments. This saves you time, letting you meet your deadline when revisions are cut to a minimum.

Passion

It's almost become a cliché, but studios sincerely want passionate artists on staff. Passion is what helps push people through tough times whether it's a deadline or particularly challenging problem. Generally speaking,

passionate employees also tend to be happier employees and their attitudes and love for what they do can be quite infectious, spreading to others.

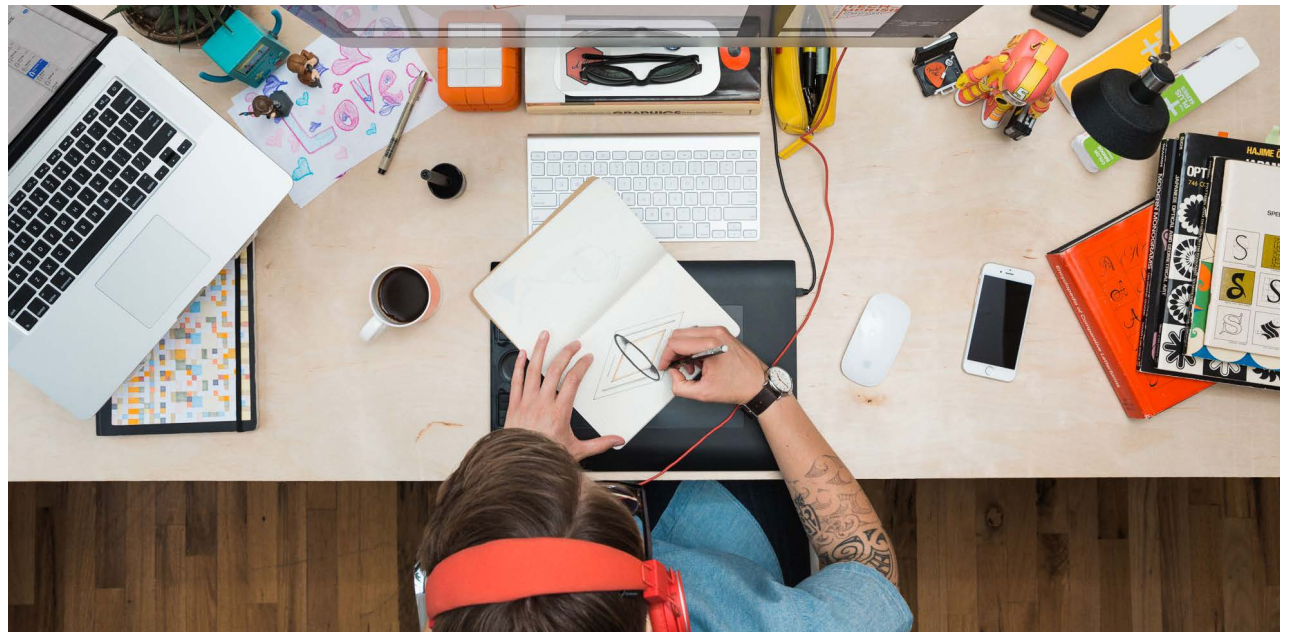
Most importantly, passionate artists tend to be more creative simply because they're constantly thinking, experimenting, revisiting their work and taking different perspectives on problems.

Checking for levels of passion when interviewing a potential hire can be as simple as asking them about things they love doing. However, at some point, you'll

want to ask them why they love doing it. The why? answer will give you insight into what continues to motivate them. Do they list something extrinsic? ("I like doing it because it's good money.") Hopefully it's something more intrinsic. ("It makes me feel like I'm growing into a better person.")

It's a reasonable assumption that individuals that have a true passion for their craft are more likely to transfer those strong feelings toward the studio's culture and the company as a whole.

"Passion is what helps push people through tough times whether it's a deadline or particularly challenging problem."





Self-motivation

Shorter turn around times for meeting deadlines is putting more and more pressure on studios to trust that their employees can produce with less oversight. Increasingly, artists need to be self-motivated, autonomous workers who have the ability to evaluate and troubleshoot problems on their own.

Vancouver Film School's Head of Animation and VFX, Vanessa Jacobsen, explained that she sees many students today who have trouble creating solutions to technological problems. "Technology is great, but often when students see it break, they just ask 'What's wrong?' or simply say 'It doesn't work!'" Self-motivated artists seldom make excuses for not being able to accomplish a task.

Another issue connected with self-motivation you should watch out for is the inability to evaluate the severity of a problem. Vancouver Film School Animation Instructor, Colin Giles explains that, "There's a lot of fear that every problem is a big problem. But the key is that you just keep trying to solve it. This is the only way to get better."

To avoid this problem, you might try designing an interview question that investigates this tendency within an applicant: "Tell us about a time when you overcame a problem and how you did it."

Speed

Again, the increased speed at which work is being demanded within the creative industries is growing exponentially. The consumer's call for media content is being heeded by every production company and studio today. When examining reels or portfolios, it's important to get an idea of how quickly an artist can produce. Asking how long it took them to draft X project is a simple way of gauging their speed.

You probably already have a good idea of what your artists are capable of doing in a given time, so applying that criteria to the applicant is an important practical consideration. However, it's probably not reasonable to hold applicants to the exact time standard as what your current artists are capable of, especially if they're new to the market. But you should have some range of acceptability when it comes to production speed.



Artistic sensibility

When you look over portfolios and discuss them with an applicant, you also need to consider their understanding of the motivation for their own work. Much of the work they will be doing for you will involve storytelling of one type or another, so their understanding of what stories their images tell is important. They should understand why they chose to create that image. Why was it important to them? What does it say? What story does it tell?

If their portfolio contains the image of, say, the face of an aging woman, you will probably assume they included it to show their adeptness with sculpting software. Every wrinkle and fold may be finely crafted

and anatomically correct, but this only shows one level of their understanding. What story does this image tell and how does it do it?

They should have a good artistic sensibility and understanding of their own work and be able to articulate this to you. Jacobsen explains, "If they know the history of why they've chosen to do that particular shot, it's going to show in the shot. I think creatively you want to make sure they understand story and why they're doing stuff."

Another thing to consider in portfolios is their length and the order of the samples. Typically, the shorter the portfolio the better. If they've got really impressive skills, they will be able to showcase this with a short selection.

Examine the ordering of the samples. Do they move from best to worst? What might this say about them personally? Why would they include something subpar at all? Do they settle for second best?

Considering these qualities of applicants can really help save you time and money. These personality traits and skills are only a small sampling of what individual artists can offer.

You probably have your very own favorites that have proven successful for years. However, it never hurts to consider what others have experienced in the interview process and to learn from their mistakes rather than repeating them.

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