



How to Get a Job at Google?

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Tom Friedman wrote a column in *The New York Times* a few weeks ago titled [“How to Get a Job at Google.”](#) According to the person in charge of hiring for Google, “G.P.A’s are worthless as a criteria (sic) for hiring, and test scores are worthless . . . We found that they don’t predict anything.” Notwithstanding the many differences between Google and the School, can we learn anything about hiring from this successful company?

Google looks for general cognitive ability, which is different from I.Q. or G.P.A. “It’s learning ability. It’s the ability to process on the fly. It’s the ability to pull together disparate bits of information.” Google invests the time to find those abilities through structured behavioral interviews that are validated.

As opposed to traditional indicators of leadership, Google looks for “emergent leadership.” “What we care about is, when faced with a problem and you’re a member of a team, do you, at the appropriate time, step in and lead. And just as critically, do you step back and stop leading, do you let someone else? Because what’s critical to be an effective leader in this environment is you have to be willing to relinquish power.”



Google also looks for humility and a sense of ownership. They want people who feel a “sense of responsibility, the sense of ownership, to step in to try to solve any problem—and the humility to step back and embrace the better ideas of others.”

Humility also includes intellectual humility because it is crucial to learning. They want people who are “zealots about their point of view. But then you say, ‘here’s a new fact,’ and they’ll go ‘Oh well, that changes things: you’re right.’ You need a big ego and a small ego in the same person at the same time.”

Google considers these qualities more important than subject-matter expertise because they want people who are more likely to come up with creative solutions. When faced with a problem, the experts are more likely to say “I’ve seen this 100 times before; here’s what you do.” Google finds that the non-experts generally can figure out what to do, “but once in a while they’ll also come up with an answer that is totally new.”



Of course Google looks for technical skills like computing and coding for many of its jobs, and good grades don't hurt a candidate. But they are looking for a lot more than technical expertise and traditional academic accomplishments. They want people who are creative, adaptable and willing to take responsibility—and who also embrace collaboration and continuous learning.

It is hard to look beyond traditional metrics in trying to predict success on the job. The School always has used academic performance as a proxy for general ability, but it has never been our only consideration. We have looked for a commitment to public service and for the ability to translate complex ideas into practical guidance for government officials. But have we emphasized traditional measures too much?

We also have tried to be sure that faculty candidates fit into the School's culture. That has meant a number of things, including hiring nice people who can get along with their colleagues and with many different kinds of public officials. In encouraging collegiality, have we discouraged constructive disagreements that could lead to greater innovation? Faculty members spend lots of time working independently, but has our recruiting adequately emphasized the ability to collaborate with others? Have we focused enough on leadership ability?

The School works in an environment that is very different than the one facing Google. We can't adopt their hiring standards, including the growing number of their employees with any college education. Google offers a provocative model, however, and it is worth reflecting on whether the School's hiring process can be improved. After all, hiring is critically important because ultimately



it determines the quality of everything else we do.

