



Most Manufacturing Leaders are achievers, so how can you spot the exceptional achiever from the average achiever?

By Tim Kahms, Operations Manager

I have talked with thousands of manufacturing leaders and reviewed many more resumes in my career as a manufacturing recruiter. Almost all leadership candidates that have risen to the level of multi- or single-site manufacturing organizations have history, performance, and promotion on their resumes.

So what then, separates average achievers from the exceptional achievers? It takes some digging by an experienced interviewer or recruiter to see the difference.

One observation I've been able to make over time is that exceptional achievers achieve at a volume and speed that average achievers do not.

Want to know how to spot exceptional achievers? Here are a few things to look for when seeking to discern between the two...

Fast growth and promotion. Those exceptional achievers get assigned to lead larger projects or teams earlier, leading to promotion more quickly than their peers.

They learn faster. Promising young leaders tend to get pushed and stretched into training and exhibit their abilities to grasp complex training. This often leads to their being assigned more complex projects, allowing them to gain early access to senior executives. Look for these trends; ask how they were trained, who sponsored them, who they got exposed to along the way. The answers will confirm they've been recognized and accepted as exceptional and pushed to rise to their capabilities.

They exhibit exceptional skills navigating team dynamics, working with others, and influencing positive outcomes. They understand their roles on teams and how they fit. Exceptional achievers get assigned to increasingly important projects with senior leaders. Ask how the person got assigned to the team? Why assigned (can show their core strengths), the result/failure of the team project, and what happened after the team project was complete.

They've been rehired or referred by former coworkers. For their past few jobs, ask how the candidate got the job and why they changed jobs. Exceptional achievers are typically sponsored and promoted new roles or referred by a former coworker or hired by a previous boss.

They build exceptional teams. Let's face it, the single biggest point of success in a leader is their ability to build, launch, and empower an exceptional team under them. When hiring people for leadership roles, it's essential that they possess a pattern of success in this area. Look for low turnover, an intentional and formal approach to staff development, hiring former coworkers, and hiring other top achievers, and a track record of their staff going on to take bigger roles. These are the managers everyone in the company wants to work with, so make sure you dig into this in detail during the interview.

They receive lots of formal recognition. Ask them about special or bigger bonuses, letters of praise, public awards, a prize, or some type of recognition they've been given.

They have a natural desire to excel. For each job in their recent history, ask about where the candidate went the extra mile. Highly motivated people will have multiple examples and will be able to provide great details and insights as to why they took the initiative. Patterns here will reveal the type of work that is intrinsically motivating to that person. Map these to the needs of the position you're hiring for to ensure a strong fit.

They have had several different roles at a company. The best people are given lateral moves to enhance their skillset and promotability. Manufacturing leaders will often come up through a plant, then over to Supply Chain, and promoted into multi-plant leadership. Ask about these moves, why they were given, and what happened as a result. Be sure there is upward progress as a result.

Diving into the deeper details to expose the difference between an average achiever and an exceptional achiever takes time, effort and experienced interviewing skills. Steve Jobs tells us it's worth the effort...

"The secret of my success is that we have gone to exceptional lengths to hire the best people in the world." - Steve Jobs