

## **Leaders - Are you an A-Player?**

By Tim Kahms, Operations Manager

We all like to think we're A-Players, but is that possible?

Much like every parent thinks their child is above average when we know that's simply not mathematically possible, when I speak to Operations Leaders and ask them point blank, if they consider themselves an 'A-Player,' every single one says "Yes, I am."

But we can't all be A-Players right?

When I ask why they consider themselves to be an A-Player, I usually get the same stock answers about their track record of success, or their ability to lead teams through change, or their experience with this or that piece of lean methodology...

### **But the real litmus test, in my view, is their hiring track record.**

I stand firmly in the belief that our effectiveness as leaders lies in our ability to identify and hire other A-Players.

To be a great leader, the quality of the team supporting is your number one concern. Consider your team to be the fuel for your career. Creating a well-rounded and high-performing team is one of the hallmarks of good leadership, and developing tomorrow's Operational "rock stars" is a responsibility that fall square on your shoulders.

In *Topgrading*, industrial psychologist and global consultant Bradford Smart explains that there are three levels of contributors within an organization. "Simply put, topgrading is the practice of packing the team with A players and clearing out the C players."...and explaining further "A players are defined as the top 10% of talent available at all salary levels: best of class. With this radical definition, you are not a topgrader until your team consists of all A players. Period."

Now that's a tall order for any organization, that's made especially difficult for organizations competing in the candidate-driven Operations Leader Market.

### **How do I know? Well, it's what I do for a living...**

Consider this, in my 30 years as a Headhunter in the manufacturing space, I estimate that I've personally interviewed between 5-6,000 candidates for all levels within the manufacturing operations vertical, from a Plant Managers team, Plant Managers, Multi-site leaders, and GM's.

### **Believe me when I tell you, I know what an A-Player look like.**

What is an A-Player? They're the top 10% of your workforce. They work hard, volunteer for additional projects, consistently go over and above what's expected, and typically rise through the ranks quickly. Bottom line, they make their leaders look good.

C-Players are they bottom 10%. They do just enough to scrape by, never take on the responsibilities, and seem to be always stuck in perpetual career limbo.

And the B-Players? All the rest. They're the 9 to 5'ers, do well within the confines of their jobs, but are averse to taking on new challenges and rise through the ranks slowly. For the most part, they're good but not great.

I know from personal experience that we all like to think of ourselves as A-Players, because it's human nature to see the quality of our work through rose-colored glasses. So my goal during the interview process is to weed out the B's and C's, and while there are a myriad ways of determining whether or not somebody is an A-Player, my number-one go-to is that candidate's own hiring history.

If my candidate is in a leadership position, I always ask about their own personal hiring process.

- How do they determine top performers from average performers?
- What questions do they ask during the interview process?
- What do they feel are important qualities to hire for, versus what to avoid at all costs?
- How successful have they been in their hiring, and how successful have the team-members been that they've hired.
- How do they determine who is a successful hire or not?

I asked these questions because I firmly believe that the single biggest commonality amongst all A-Players, is they love to hire other A-Players. They want to build winning teams yes, but more importantly, they want to win. They recognize that in order for them to succeed, they have to hire people smarter and more capable than them.

I've found that B and C players tend to hire those who are just good enough. Whether it's because true A-Players don't want to work for them (a strong possibility), they don't have the confidence that they can attract and retain top candidates, or if they're just out-right intimidated, their hiring track record tells me what we need to know.

So how can you determine if you're truly an A-Player leader? Take a look at your own hiring practices, and ask yourself this simple yet tough question.

**“Am I hiring people better than me?”**