



The Rare Find: How Great Talent Stands Out

George Anders

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One of the nation's biggest music labels briefly signed Taylor Swift to a contract but let her go because she didn't seem worth more than \$15,000 a year. At least four book publishers passed on the first Harry Potter novel rather than pay J. K. Rowling a \$5,000 advance. And the same pattern happens in nearly every business.

Anyone who recruits talent faces the same basic challenge, whether we work for a big company, a new start-up, a Hollywood studio, a hospital, or the Green Berets. We all wonder how to tell the really outstanding prospects from the ones who look great on paper but then fail on the job. Or, equally important, how to spot the ones who don't look so good on paper but might still deliver extraordinary performance.

Over the past few decades, technology has made recruiting in all fields vastly more sophisticated. Gut instincts have yielded to benchmarks. If we want elaborate dossiers on candidates, we can gather facts (and video) by the gigabyte. And yet the results are just as spotty as they were in the age of the rotary phone.

George Anders sought out the world's savviest talent judges to see what they do differently from the rest of us. He reveals how the U.S. Army finds soldiers with the character to be in Special Forces without asking them to fire a single bullet. He takes us to an elite basketball tournament in South Carolina, where the best scouts watch the game in a radically different way from the casual fan. He talks to researchers who are reinventing the process of hiring Fortune 500 CEOs.

Drawing on the best advice of these and other talent masters, Anders reveals powerful ideas you can apply to your own hiring. For instance:

- **Don't ignore "the jagged résumé"**-people whose background appears to teeter on the edge between success and failure. Such people can do spectacular work in the right settings, where their strengths dramatically outweigh their flaws.
- **Look extra hard for "talent that whispers"**- the obscure, out-of-the-way candidates who most scouting systems overlook.
- **Be careful with "talent that shouts"**-the spectacular but brash candidates who might have trouble with loyalty, motivation, and team spirit.

Each field that Anders explores has its own lingo, customs, and history. But the specific stories fit together into a bigger mosaic. In any field, there's an art to clearing away the clutter and focusing on what matters most. It's not necessarily hard, but it requires the courage to take a different approach in pursuit of the rare find.

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