

## Up in the Air

George Clooney's latest movie is an appropriate metaphor for post-bubble America. Called *Up in the Air*, it tells the story of a human resource professional who works for what might best be described as a LOO—a Lay Off Outsourcing firm. Clooney travels 10 million miles by plane doing the dirty work of firing employees companies no longer want or can afford.

The story is a downer—Clooney not only does a dirty job, but he gets laid off by his love interest who turns out to be married with kids. A secondary theme, however, does offer us some hope. It explores our current fascination with best practices and subtly offers a way to make them work better.

The movie's plot centers around a bright recent graduate who has a neat idea to automate the downsizing process thereby saving the LOO a ton of travel money and the wear and tear on its consultants. Our hero knows better, of course, and by the end of the movie, Clooney has taught her a thing or two about the human side of their work. More importantly, he personifies a value we often overlook in our efforts to improve performance: character matters most. Especially in recruiting.

### Character in Recruiting

The dictionary defines character as “The combination of qualities or features that distinguishes one person, group, or thing from another.” While that may be accurate, I think it's much too neutral. To me, character has a decidedly positive overtone. It is the combination of qualities or features that represent the best of a person or group.

The irony, of course, is that we spend countless hours attending recruitment conferences and training programs that teach us the best practices in our field, and that effort leaves us little or no time to focus on character. Yet, character is the secret sauce of best practices. The best practices work best in the hands of recruiters who are at their best as people. Implement the best practices with a recruiter whose character is deficient, and they may fill their reqs, but they will never recruit the best talent.

Why? Because character operates like a magnet. It attracts those who have it and repels those who don't. And the best talent are almost always people of character. They not only perform at their peak, they help others do so, as well. Or to put it another way, they focus on both doing things right and doing the right things.

The best talent have their pick of employers, and not surprisingly, they want to work with the best of their peers. While they may know a colleague or two in any given organization, they will often judge the character of its overall workforce by the character of its recruiters. A recruiter without character, therefore, can be an expert in social networking; they can make Twitter sing, they can write job postings even the most passive job seekers will read, but they cannot recruit top talent. Their nature actually pushes them away.

Happily, the converse is also true. Recruiters of character have a powerful advantage in the War for the Best Talent. They bring in top performers because they are top performers themselves, and because they have personal attributes that resonate with those individuals. They transform the recruiting experience from a transaction between strangers to an interaction between those who share a commitment to being their best.

What does that mean? What is the character of recruiters? I'll explore the elements of character in general and how they apply to recruiters in my next column.

Thanks for reading,

Peter

Visit my blog at [Weddles.com/WorkStrong](http://Weddles.com/WorkStrong)

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