

## J. Michael Locke

### Musings

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#### #54: Don't Look for the Shooting Star May 16, 2020

When searching for talent, don't go looking for "shooting stars" but rather, avoid them.

By "shooting star," I am referencing certain individuals who show well and "shine bright" only to fizzle out. I was particularly prone to this mistake in the past and hope you can avoid my pain. Some suggestions.

Shooting stars do very well in the first interview. They are polished, have the right answers and are ready with questions. However, like Wendy's, if you spend more time with them you ask: "where is the beef?" Rather than doing a series of 45 minute interviews with different people, you smoke out the shooting star by having a number of interviews with the same person. As a hiring manager, I recommend you meet with someone three or more times before hiring them. These interviews should range from in the office for 30 minutes to over lunch for an hour. For senior executive hires, I recommend a long dinner – partners included.

If you are stuck with the "lots of interviews with lots of people" model, make sure to gather the various interviewers collectively on a call after the prospective employee visits. While some worry about group think, I have found you can quickly pull out themes by comparing different conversations. The shooting star tends to repeat his or her stories and questions so that comes out when you compare notes.

Interviewing prospective employees should also be a little nervous. That is just human nature. I will never forget Shari Harlan (RIP) tugging at her suit coat as I interviewed her. She was quite nervous and did fine but did not overwhelm in the first interview. Every interview after that, she got stronger. She ended up being a fantastic hire who had great endurance.

Shooting stars also tend to move around. It takes six months to really see if someone is good and unfortunately probably another three to six months to move them out. If you see someone with one year stints, beware. Even if they have a good "story" on why things didn't work out, I would just move on and take the risk on someone else. Another red flag is a pre-written reference. I interpret that as part of a "settlement" as they departed and wanted to ensure they could control the reference check.

Be safe. Work hard.

Jml

#### *Second Thoughts*

We need to be talking more about social distancing and safe opening vs shelter at home. A Janesville, Wisconsin gastropub owner said: "We're not looking for a handout, we're not looking for a loan to dig

ourselves deeper in debt — we've already taken out a second mortgage on our home, we've drained our savings and we took out the bank loan. We're just looking for the opportunity to work hard, get back to work and we think we have a safe manner in which we can do so." Rather than government officials deciding what businesses are "essential", let's focus on how commerce can be conducted safely.

Learned a new one this week. EbitdaC. That is ebitda and then add back Coronavirus expenses. You decide.