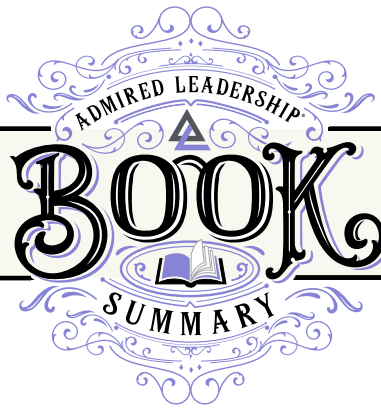




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



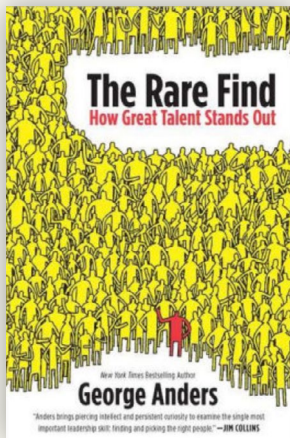
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The Rare Find

How Great Talent Stands Out

BOOK AUTHOR: GEORGE ANDERS

Published 2012



New York Times bestselling author George Anders searched out the advice of top talent agents in a wide range of disciplines – from Hollywood and music executives to Special Forces leaders to CEOs – to find out how they find and keep the best talent. In his book **The Rare Find**, he shares what he found and explains how leaders and recruiters can apply these ideas to their company’s hiring scenarios. “There’s an art to cleaning away clutter and focusing on what matters most,” says Anders, and he gives you the tools to detect rare talent that will go the distance in your organization (p. 8).

Key Quote

“Running throughout the book is the understanding that rare talent often emerges in unexpected ways” (p. 13).

Key Points

Character counts. Compromise on experience; don’t compromise on character. In conversations, be wary of arrogance and look for signs of humility.

Look for grit. In interviews of successful Special Forces candidates, common refrains include “I’ve done worse than this,” and “This sucks so bad it’s humorous” (p. 31).

Seek out “talent that whispers.” Have the willingness to look outside of the ideal geography, feeder schools, etc. to find talent.

Take tiny chances – so you can take more of them. For example, don’t overpay for name-brand talent. You can take more chances on lower-priced, lower-risk talent when you find it.

Draw out the “hidden truths” of each job. What is the *real* competency needed to succeed in this work? Develop a list of key talents or attributes needed in your company or industry.

Be willing to use your own career as a template of what talent looks like at a young age.

Master the art of aggressive listening. Pose tests and ask the right questions of the people you are considering as candidates.

Consider the “jagged resumé.” Often the most intriguing candidates don’t have resumes that fit the mold. “Drive and ingenuity” can often make a resumé look unorthodox (p. 63). And remember, your own career may be a template for success in your field.

Stretch them but don’t break them. It’s important to stretch – but not break – your best trainees, because workers that aren’t quite world-class can still make good team members elsewhere.

Key Concepts:

MIND THE GAP

“The gap between good and great turns out to be huge. Leaders can’t ignore it.” Using averages as accurate measures of individuals has been so thoroughly ingrained in our minds and the systems that govern our society that we rarely question their use (p. 10). Averages provide a stable and transparent foundation for quick decision-making, but they do little to describe individuals. They are useful only when one is comparing two groups of people. “We can only understand individuals by focusing on individuality in its own right” (p. 12).

Commodities trader Richard Dennis decided to find out if he could really teach “anyone” how to be a world-class stock trader if they only followed his rules for investing. He found that while his rules were sound, the performance came down to which traders were able to keep their emotions in check and act responsibly related to risk. The key indicator of success became people who could keep their reason about themselves even when their risk or loss aversion kicked in (p. 65).

Dennis would ask his prospective stock traders, “Would you rather be lucky or smart?” Those who chose luck would be shown the door since Dennis did not believe that the belief that the ends justifying the means was a mark of talent (p. 66).

ATTITUDE AND AN OPEN MIND

Prioritize role models in your group or team. For example, the entire tone of a medical school class can be set by a few carefully chosen students who may not be the strongest in scores or grades but have the right attitudes to be fabulous classmates (p. 84).

Bill Hewlett of HP recruited the first employees in two stages. His first step was to recruit in what he called the “enthusiasm stage,” where he asked many questions and induced as much conversation as possible. Second, he moved to the “inquisition and decision stage,” where he became more critical. “As a result, the best ideas (and most talented engineers) prospered within HP.” Hewlett sent a message that “new ideas were welcome at HP” (p. 146).



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On the importance of keeping an open mind, famed country music producer Scott Borchetta shares a story. Early in his career he “barely said hello to the part-time receptionist at MTM Music, a quiet college student named Trisha Yearwood. A decade later, she became one of country music’s biggest stars. Borchetta had worked alongside her for months and never even knew she liked to sing. From that awkward gaffe, Borchetta told [Anders], he took away a lifelong lesson: ‘Talent can be anywhere’” (p. 174).

THRIVING IN A CHALLENGE

“Benchmark organizations hardly ever coddle their stars. Instead, they set huge goals and run the hardest auditions. They hurl the best candidates through drawn-out tests of valor that may last for years. They have the audacity to portray hardship and possible failure as selling points for their jobs, rather than a liability. Run-of-the-mill candidates don’t want any part of this” (p. 186).

Difficult-to-manage talent is best managed when they are given extraordinarily difficult challenges. Pixar animator Brad Bird’s “keenest memories involved moments where he stared down failure – and won.” Bird describes the pressure he faced from Pixar to produce the high-level animation they needed for *Ratatouille* as “like driving down the freeway the wrong way, just trying to live. . . My heart is still racing from it” (p. 190).

The idea of the “third question” is important. In boardrooms, the first questions that people ask tend to be abstract. The second question delves deeper. But many people are wary of asking a third question, because it may seem like the person is skeptical or is dominating the discussion. However, when interviewing talent, the third question is key (p. 222).

SIGNS OF A GOOD LEADER

Dean Stamoulis of executive search firm Russell Reynolds “looks for executives who edit themselves mid-conversation, making quick adjustments to correct a minor detail. That’s a rare habit – and a good sign, he says. When executives talk about a trend ‘throughout Asia,’ and then amend their remarks a moment later to say, ‘or at least in what I’ve seen in India and China,’ that impresses him (p. 224).

Executive recruiter John Isaacson looks for “hunger, speed, and weight.” “Hunger is the eagerness to master new challenges. Speed is the ability to do so. And ‘weight’ refers to the leader’s judicious use of power within each job.” Isaacson explains that weight “speaks to the question: Why would anyone follow you” (p. 225)?

KEY TALENT INDICATORS

“One of the most overlooked strengths in America today can be expressed in one word: resilience.” Resilience is a key indicator of performance in a wide range of professions from Special Forces soldiers to teachers at inner-city schools (p. 21).



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Do not underestimate the value of mettle, which is “being able to deal confidently with the unknown” (p. 25).

For web coders, “hair-trigger math skills alone are only a modest part of the picture. Ingenuity, stamina, and adherence to standards are at least as important” (p. 44).

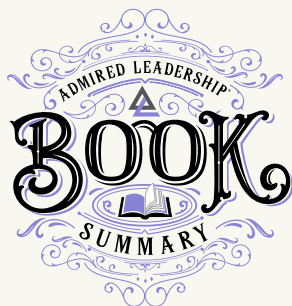
For teachers, the will to keep improving, to draw others into the process, and to “work backward” from a large goal to find the initial steps to be taken (p. 52).

For the FBI, “initiative, perseverance, and compatibility, “discipline, trainability, and judgment,” and “loyalty, leadership, and maturity” (p. 114).

For country music artists, it is more than being able to make a good record. “What differentiated the stars from the hangers-on, [Borchetta] believed, was whether performers thrived on the road – or fell apart.” Artists who got into drugs or didn’t have trusted friends or family had breakdowns, while those who loved traveling and meeting fans won over crowds wherever they went (p. 174).

Relationships are the key to finding a good job. Remember that job hunting is like apartment hunting – the best ones are never listed. Getting a great job is about getting to know the landlord to find a great apartment (p. 254). You should find a great apartment by building relationships with people who would like to be your landlord. Go to the building and introduce yourself to the agent. Ask them if anything is coming up in the next few months. That’s how you get a great apartment.

Anders, G. (2012). **The Rare Find: How Great Talent Stands Out.**
New York: Portfolio/Penguin.



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The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

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