

## Summary of Key Concepts

From

*Topgrading: How Leading companies Win by Hiring, Coaching, and Keeping the Best People*

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### WHY TOPGRADING?

- *Definition: A player* – One who qualifies among the top 10 percent of those available for a position and is willing to accept a job offer in your sector, organization, and location.
  - See page 8 and 9 for comparison between A players and B and C players on 12 competencies: vision, intelligence, leadership, passion, resourcefulness, customer focus, topgrading (their staff), coaching, team building, track record, integrity, oral/written communication skills.
  - A 1 player – qualified for executive leadership
  - A 2 player – A player for current position and 1-2 levels above current position
  - A 3 player – A player for current position
- *Benefits for non-profits:*
  - Quality of service to clients increase significantly
  - A players are talent magnets
  - Everyone achieves more work / life balance because the organization isn't carrying "dead weight" on its staff
- *Process for Building an organization filled with A players: (pp 184-185 has a checklist for overcoming major obstacles to topgrading)*
  - Topgrade from the top down
  - Require A players to make the topgrading judgments for their B/Cs.
  - When hiring, perform more accurate assessments using the topgrading interview (in tandem with another A player or a supervisor who is an A player.
  - Continually recruit your "virtual bench" for positions that are not yet open. Develop a network of A players in your rolodex.
  - Manage the search process, including search firms much more thoroughly
  - Provide new A players "air cover, protection from undermining" by existing personnel (who are b / c players and protecting the old culture
  - A players are available at all levels of compensation. For non profits, use all seven job rewards to attract and retain A players. Things that reinforce people in positions include: Social (recognition of a job well done), Personal Growth, Job

Control, Status, Economic, Job Environment, and Naturally Occurring (motivators like feel of satisfaction and accomplishment etc.)

- Provide B/C players the chance to develop into A players
- Topgrade first – once you do this, your organization can do anything.  
Remember, people and organizational culture eats strategy for lunch. You can't solve B/C player employees with a new strategic plan.
- If a manager can't hire A players, hire them yourself
- Once you hit the tipping point with A players in your organization it will be easier to redeploy or coach out of the organization B and C players.
- Keep your board informed and apprised of your topgrading efforts.

**SHIFT IN TRADITIONAL CAREER MANAGEMENT PARADIGM** (pp 215-216 for checklist on becoming an A player)

<b>Traditional Career Management</b>	<b>New Career Management</b>
<i>Work Harder</i>	<i>Work Smarter and achieve life / work balance in career success, wellness, family and other relationship, pleasure (recreation, Hobbies), spiritual grounding, financial independence, giving something back and being creative</i>
<i>Goal: career success</i>	<i>Goal: happiness</i>
<i>Live slightly above your means</i>	<i>Live below your means (develop a financial nest egg to provide you freedom to choose what you do for a job)</i>
<i>Someone else manages my career (getting on a bus with someone else driving it)</i>	<i>You manage your own career (driving an all terrain vehicle)</i>
<i>Accept job opportunities that look good</i>	<i>Look for "job fit" where your talents and the organization will allow you to be an A player; bigger isn't always better</i>
<i>Develop your strengths (don't focus on your weaknesses)</i>	<i>Continually develop; have an Individual Development Plan; overcome your weak points (more than just maximizing your strengths)</i>
<i>Hide negatives</i>	<i>Reveal weak points / negatives</i>

**12 ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES NEEDED TO BECOME AN A PLAYER** (and common failings of B/C players). The list below identifies the essential competencies and behaviors that would indicate that someone **isn't** skilled in the competencies.

- *Resourcefulness* – “too passive,” “doesn’t create opportunities,” “always trying to delegate upward”
- *Selecting A players and redeploying B/C players* – “mis-hires too many,” “has a team of B and C players,” “afraid to hire someone better than He/she is,” “just won’t upgrade”
- *Passion* – “not highly motivated,” “lacks drive,” “goes through the motions”
- *Integrity* – “lies,” “can’t be trusted to keep promises,” “breaks confidences,” “gossips,” “pushes legal boundaries too far”
- *Ambition* – “too ambitious,” “always trying to get the promotion rather than serve the company”
- *Political Savvy* – “a dirty Politician,” “backstabber”
- *Adaptability* – “over her head,” “can’t adjust to our reorganization,” “job is too complex for her”
- *Team builder* – “can’t empower anyone,” “control freak,” “old fashioned autocrat”
- *Team player* – “builds silos,” “thinks his department is the only one,” “won’t coordinate across departments, causing major production waste,” “not a team player”
- *Track Record* – “missed her numbers again,” “sandbagger,” “more excuses than reasons”
- *Intelligence* – “lacks the brainpower to adapt,” “slow learner,” “just doesn’t get it”
- *Likability* – “arrogant,” “condescending,” “egotistical,” “doesn’t treat people with respect,” “demeaning,” “sarcastic,” etc.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUPER COACH

- **A Partner.** “Hey, you’ve got a problem, let’s work on it together,” interested, engaged, respectful, and respected.
- **Promotes autonomy.** Helps the coachee to independently diagnose problems and consider solutions; makes informed choices regarding development.
- **Positive.** Is supportive, builds confidence, is an enthusiastic motivator. Uses praise and recognition for progress and accomplishment. Never ridicules. Is passionate. Has a sense of humor.
- **Trustworthy.** Is honest and open. Maintains confidences. Admits when wrong. Doesn’t overpromise.
- **Caring.** Is compassionate, empathetic, and sincere.
- **Patient.** Understands how hard it is to change. Is tolerant and reasonable.
- **Results oriented.** Focuses only on important issues. Is proactive and infectiously committed to helping coachee perform. Follow through on promises.
- **Perceptive.** Understands coachee’s strengths, shortcomings, goals, and needs.

- **Authoritative.** *Is knowledgeable and wise. Is clear and specific in feedback. Has common sense. Generates valid measures of improvement. (Don't confuse authoritative with authoritarian, which means dictatorial.)*
- **Active listener.** *Plays back content and underlying feelings. Summarizes, clarifies.*

**EASE OF CHANGING COMPETENCIES** (pp. 255-256 has a chart that lists competencies in three categories: Relatively Easy to Change; Harder but Doable; Very Difficult to Change)

Relatively Easy to Change	Harder but Doable	Very Difficult to Change
Risk Taking	Judgment	Intelligence
Leading Edge	Strategic Skills	Analysis Skills
Education	Pragmatism	Creativity
Experience	Track Record	Conceptual Ability
Organization / Planning	Resourcefulness	Integrity
Self Awareness	Excellence Standards	Assertiveness
Communications – Oral	Independence	Inspiring Followership
Communications – Written	Stress Management	Energy
First Impression	Adaptability	Passion
Customer Focus	Likability	Ambition
Political Savvy	Listening	Tenacity
Selecting A Players	Team Player	
Redeploying B/C Players	Negotiation Skills	
Coaching / Training	Persuasiveness	
Goal Setting	Team Builder	
Empowerment	Change Leadership	
Performance Management	Diversity	
Running Meetings	Conflict Management	
Compatibility of Needs	Credible Vision	
	Balance in Life	

## 50 COMPETENCIES WITH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Intellectual Competencies:

- **Intelligence**
  - *Please describe your learning ability*
  - *Describe a complex situation in which you had to learn a lot quickly. How did you go about learning and how successful were the outcomes?*
- **Analysis Skills**

- *Please describe your problem analysis skills.*
- *Do people generally regard you as one who diligently pursues ever detail or do you tend to be more broad brush? Why?*
- *What will references indicate are your style and overall effectiveness in “sorting” the wheat from the chaff?*
- *What analytic approaches and tools do you use?*
- *Please give me an example of digging more deeply for facts than what was asked of you.*
- **Judgment / Decision Making**
  - *Please describe your decision-making approach when you are faced with difficult situations, in comparison with others, at about your level in the organization. Are you decisive and quick, but sometimes too quick, or are you more thorough but sometimes too slow? Are you intuitive ore do you go purely with the facts? Do you involve many or few people in decisions?*
  - *What are a couple of the most difficult or challenging decisions you have made recently?*
  - *What are a couple of the best and worst decisions you have made in the past year?*
  - *What maxims do you live by?*
- **Conceptual Ability**
  - *Are you more comfortable dealing with concrete, tangible, short term issues, or more abstract, conceptual, long-term issues? Please explain.*
- **Creativity**
  - *How creative are you? What are the best examples of your creativity in processes, systems, methods, products, structure, or services?*
  - *Do you consider yourself a better visionary or implementer, and why?*
- **Strategic Skills**
  - *In the past year, what specifically have you done in order to remain knowledgeable about the competitive environment, market and trade dynamixs, products / services and technology trends, innovations, and patterns of consumer behavior?*
  - *Please describe your experience in strategic planning, including successful and unsuccessful approaches. (determine the individual’s contribution in team strategic efforts.)*
  - *Where do you predict that your (industry / competitors / function) is going in the next three years? What is the conventional wisdom, and what are your own thoughts?*
- **Pragmatism**

- *Do you consider yourself a more visionary or more pragmatic thinker, and why?*
- **Risk Taking**
  - *What are the biggest risks you have taken in recent years? Include ones that have worked out well and not so well.*
- **Leading Edge**
  - *How have you copied, created, or applied best practices?*
  - *Describe projects in which your best practice solutions did and did not fully address customer / client needs.*
  - *How will references rate and describe your technical expertise? Are you truly leading edge, or do you fall a bit short in some areas?*
  - *How computer literate are you?*
  - *Please describe your professional network.*
- **Education**
  - *What seminars or formal education have you participated in and when?*
  - *Describe your reading habits (books and articles on global factors, general business, functional specialty, industry).*
- **Experience**
  - *Compose a series of open-ended questions – “how would you rate yourself in \_\_\_\_\_, and what specifics can you cite?” for finance, learn expertise in treasury, controller, risk management, etc., areas. For human resources, learn expertise in selection, training, compensation, etc.*
  - *What are the most important lessons you have learned in your career? (Get specifics with respect to when, where, what, etc.)*
- **Track Record**
  - *Looking back in your career, what were your most and least successful jobs?*

#### **Personal Competencies:**

- **Integrity**
  - *Describe a situation or two in which the pressures to compromise your integrity were the strongest you have ever felt.*
  - *What are a couple of the most courageous actions or unpopular stands you have ever taken?*
  - *When have you confronted unethical behavior or chosen to not say anything, in order to not rock the boat?*
  - *Under what circumstances have you found it justifiable to break a confidence?*
- **Resourcefulness**
  - *What actions would you take in the first weeks, should you join our organization?*

- *What sorts of obstacles have you faced in your present / most recent job, and what did you do?*
- *What are examples of circumstances in which you were expected to do a certain thing and, on your own, went beyond the call of duty?*
- *Who have been your major career influences, and why?*
- *Are you better at initiating a lot of things or hammering out results for fewer things? (Get specifics.)*
- **Organization / Planning**
  - *How well organized are you? What do you do to be organized and what; if anything do you feel you ought to do to be better organized?*
  - *When was the last time you missed a significant deadline?*
  - *Describe a complex challenge you have had coordinating a project.*
  - *Are you better at juggling a number of priorities or projects simultaneously, or attacking a few projects, one at a time?*
  - *Everyone procrastinates at times. What are the kinds of things that you procrastinate on?*
  - *How would you describe your work habits?*
  - *If I were to talk with administrative assistants you have had during the past several years, how would they describe your strengths and weak points with respect to personal organization, communications, attention to detail, and planning?*
  - *Describe a situation that did not go as well as planned. What would you have done differently?*
- **Excellence**
  - *Have you significantly “raised the bar” for yourself or others? Explain how you did it – your approach, the problems encountered, and the outcomes.*
- **Independence**
  - *Do you believe in asking for forgiveness rather than permission, or are you inclined to be sure your bosses are in full agreement before you act?*
  - *How much supervision do you want or need?*
- **Stress Management**
  - *What sort of mood swings, do you experience – how high are the highs, how low are the lows, and why?*
  - *What do you do to alleviate stress? (Look for exercise, quiet periods, etc.)*
  - *How do you handle yourself under stress and pressure?*
  - *Describe yourself in terms of emotional control; what sorts of things irritate you the most or get you down?*

- *How many times have you “lost your cool” in the past couple of months? (Get specifics.)*
- **Self-Awareness**
  - *Have you gotten any sort of systemic or regular feedback (360 degree or otherwise) from direct reports, clients, peers, supervisors, etc., and if so, what did you learn?*
  - *How much feedback do you like to get from people you report to, and in what form (written, face to face)?*
  - *What are the biggest mistakes you’ve made in the past (ten) years, and what have you learned from them?*
  - *What are your principal developmental needs and what are your plans to deal with them?*
  - *What have been the most difficult criticism for you to accept?*
- **Adaptability**
  - *How have you changed during recent years?*
  - *What sorts of organization changes have you found easiest and most difficult to accept?*
  - *When have you been so firm people consider you stubborn or inflexible?*
- **First Impression**
  - *Judge directly in interview.*
  - *What sort of first impression do you think you make at different levels in an organization?*

## **Interpersonal competencies**

- **Likability**
  - *When were you so frustrated you did not treat someone with respect?*
  - *How would you describe your sense of humor?*
  - *Tell me about a situation in which you were expected to work with a person you disliked.*
- **Listening**
  - *Are you familiar with the term active listening? How would you define it? What would coworkers say regarding how often and how effectively you use active listening?*
- **Customer Focus**
  - *If you were to arrange confidential reference calls with some of your major clients / customers, what is your best guess as to what they would generally atree are your strengths and areas for improvement?*

- *Relate an example of your partnering with a client / customer helping the client / customer to achieve its goals and financial results.*
- *Give examples of your going beyond what was normally expected to enhance our company's reputation or image.*
- *Describe your methods of diagnosing client / customer needs.*
- *What is your "track record" in both acquiring and retaining clients / customers?*
- *Tell me about the most frustrated or disappointed client / customer you have had in recent years.*
- **Team Player**
  - *What will reference checks disclose to be the common perception among peers regarding how much of a team player you are (working cooperatively, building others' confidence and self-esteem)?*
  - *Describe the most difficult person with whom you have had to work.*
  - *When have you stood up to a boss?*
  - *Tell me about a situation in which you felt others were wrong and you were right.*
- **Assertiveness**
  - *How would you describe your level of assertiveness?*
  - *When there is a difference of opinion, do you tend to confront people directly or indirectly, or tend to let the situation resolve itself? (Get specifics.)*
  - *Please give a couple of recent specific examples in which you were highly assertive: one in which the outcome was favorable, and one where it wasn't.*
- **Communications – Oral**
  - *How would you rate yourself in public speaking? If we had a video tape of your most recent presentation, what would we see?*
  - *Describe the last time you put your foot in your mouth.*
  - *How do you communicate with your organization?*
- **Communications – Written**
  - *How would you describe your writing style in comparison to others' styles?*
- **Political Savvy**
  - *Describe a couple of the most difficult, challenging, or frustrating company political situations you have faced.*
  - *How aware are you of company political forces that may affect your performance: please give a couple of examples of the most difficult political situations in which you have been involved, internally and with clients.*
- **Negotiation**
  - *Describe situations in which your negotiation skills proved effective and ineffective.*
- **Persuasion**

- Describe a situation in which you were most effective selling an idea or yourself.
- Describe situations in which your persuasion skills proved ineffective.

### **Management Competencies**

- **Selecting A Players**
  - What have your most recent two teams looked like (how many A, B, and C players) and what changes were made?
  - Explain your selection process in terms of job analysis, job description, behavioral competencies, amount of structure to interviews, if there is an in-depth chronological interview, and how reference checks are done.
- **Coaching**
  - How would subordinates you have had in recent years describe your approaches to training and developing them? (Look for coaching, challenging assignments.)
- **Goal Setting**
  - How do you go about establishing goals for performance (bottom up, top down, or what)? Are they easy or “stretch” goals?
  - How are your expectations communicated?
- **Empowerment**
  - How “hands-on” a manager are you? (Get specifics.)
- **Accountability**
  - Tell me about the performance management system you now use.
  - How effective have been your methods for following up on delegated assignments?
  - Tell me about accountability. What happens when people fail to perform?
  - What do you say or do when someone reporting to you has made a significant (serious, costly) mistake?
  - Cite examples of your giving negative feedback to someone.
- **Redeploying B/C Players**
  - How many nonperformers have you removed in recent years? What approaches were used? (Look for regular, honest feedback, sincere training and development efforts, B/C players more apt to ask for a different job or quit than to be fired, and redeployment in months, not years.)
- **Team Building**
  - How have you tried to build teamwork?
  - Which of your teams has been the biggest disappointment in terms of cohesiveness or effectiveness?
- **Diversity**

- *When have you actively confronted indications of discrimination or prejudicial behavior?*
- *How have you added to diversity (ethnic, cultural, racial, gender) in a workplace?*
- *Have there been any successful employment charges against you (EE)C, sexual harassment, etc.)?*
- **Running Meetings**
  - *How productive are meetings you run? How could they become more productive?*
  - *How would you describe your role in meetings – ones that you have called and those in which you have been a participant?*

### **Leadership (Additional Competencies)**

- **Vision**
  - *What is (was) your vision for your present (most recent) job? How was the vision developed?*
- **Change Leadership**
  - *In what specific ways have you changed an organization the most (in terms of direction, results, policies)?*
  - *What has been your approach to communications in changes? (Look for communicating like mad!)*
- **Inspiring “Followership”**
  - *Are you a “natural leader”? if so, cite indications.*
  - *Give examples of when people might have readily followed your lead and when they did not.*
- **Conflict Management**
  - *Describe a situation in which you actively tore down walls or barriers to teamwork.*
  - *Describe situations in which you prevented or resolved conflicts.*
  - *If two subordinates are fighting, what do you do? (Look for bringing them together to resolve it.)*

### **Motivational Competencies**

- **Energy**
  - *How many hours per week have you worked, on the average, during the past year?*
  - *What motivates you?*
- **Passion**
  - *How would you rate yourself (and why) in enthusiasm and charisma?*

- *Describe the pace at which you work – fast, slow, or moderate and the circumstances under which it varies.*
- **Ambition (see *Plans and Goals for the Future*)**
  - *Who have been recent career influences, and why?*
- **Compatibility of Needs**
  - *Is there anything we and I can do the help you if there is a job change (relocation, housing, etc.)?*
- **Balance in Life**
  - *How satisfied are you with your balance in life – the balance among work, wellness, community involvement, professional associations, hobbies, etc.?*
- **Tenacity**
  - *What are examples of the biggest challenges you have faced and overcome?*
  - *What will references say is your general level of urgency?*

***Other Competencies (that you think are important)***

**SELF ASSESSMENT FOR EACH COMPETENCY – a Process for Personal Development** (see “Fix my Weakness” Play on pp 221 – 245)

Go through each competency and write your self assessment of your ability in this area. Then seek advice from others on how this competency can be enhanced. Use this information to develop your IDP (Individual Development Plan)