

Quorum

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The Magic Genie Question – *What do you really want to do?*

Many years ago I decided to start a toy company and make stuffed animals. At the time I was working in the New York office of what was then the accounting firm Coopers & Lybrand. During the first week after I gave my notice, friends and colleagues would stop by my office to chide me about toys and stuffed animals. The next week, things were different.

People would wait until I was alone at my desk. They would come over, sit down and say, “Wow, you’re starting a toy company! You know, I have always wanted to...” Now what was interesting was that what they always wanted to do was, without exception, something simple. One person wanted to own a deli, one a pizzeria, one a clothing store, all completely real and attainable. So when I would ask them what keeps them from opening the deli, the card shop, the consulting business, or other enterprise, the answer was always the same, “I can’t!”

As I heard each story, I could hear my grandfather saying to me as a small boy, “Get a great education. Then find something you love and do it! Sweat blood if you must, but work for your self! If you love what you do, you’ll be successful.” These were wise words from a self-made man.

From this experience I have developed what I call the “Magic Genie Question.” If I were a magic genie and could immediately grant you the ability to do whatever you most want to do, the only condition being that you must love it so much that you leap out of bed in the morning and have to be pulled back in at the end of the day, what would you want to do?

The question asks what it is that someone positively and deeply desires to do in his or her life. What fascinates me about the question is how rare it is that I get an answer and the times that I get answers; they are immediate, clear and simple.

I asked this question of the Chief Operating Officer of an insurance company. He shot back with, “I want to be a landscaper. I want to take care of people’s houses, trees and lawns; have a big truck and a small crew; and at the end of the day go home, have a beer and hang with the family.” He did not have to think about it, he knew. Others answered just as simply, “I want to do exactly what I’ve been doing.” Or “I love what I do. I can’t imagine doing anything else.” Why is this question important to us as executive search consultants and to our clients?

Good executive search firms will spend significant time helping their clients reach clarity on why they need a certain position, how that position helps their business, what it takes to do the role and how success will be concretely measured. At Quorum, we view this as the foundation of any engagement. During the course of any search assignment, quality search consultants will shift

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their focus to the candidates and what they are looking for in a career. It is at this point that the Magic Genie Questions gets asked. Our view is that from the candidate side, we are in the business of dreams, aspirations and ambitions.

Quorum tells clients that there is a moment in the process when we need to understand the candidate in the same way we have worked to understand the client. If we can really understand the dreams, aspirations and ambitions of a candidate and how they match up with the strategic and tactical goals of the client, then we can bring to both parties something powerful. When done right, and it is hard to do, the candidate says, “This is the position I have always wanted” and clients say, “How did you find this person? They are exactly what I imagined and hoped for!” This creates a positive cycle that affects staff, productivity, morale and the business.

In the current turmoil, this question becomes increasingly important. When one considers all the changes taking place, there is no better question to ask ourselves than what we would really love to do. The wonderful thing about this question is that there are only right answers. Getting to the answer may be difficult. But the results could be profoundly rewarding.

Remember what the old man said. “Find something you love and do it!”

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