Case Study - Choosing a New Director of Research

Sandra Coke is vice president for research and development at Great Lakes Foods (GLF), a large snack food company that has approximately 1,000 employees. As a result of a recent reorganization, Sandra must choose the new director of research. The three candidates Sandra is considering are Alexa Smith, Kelsey Metts and Thomas Santiago. From reading the backgrounds of each candidate Alexa exhibits the leadership trait determination. Sociability trait is evident in Kelsey and Thomas exhibits the Integrity trait. After reading the chapter on leadership skills Thomas has good conceptual skills that are required for a director (He believes in the values of GLF, and actively promotes its mission) while Alexa has good technical skills and Kelsey has great human skills that are required in a director.

If you were one of the candidates applying for this position what would you do to improve your chances of being selected?

If I was a candidate applying for this position I will first start with what are the required skills for the position. What is the expectation for the position. If possible and if I have contacts I will also try to find out the personality and leadership style of Sandra Coke who is responsible to hire the director of research. I will also try to understand Sandra’s expectation and preferences for the ideal candidate. To me it is also very important I like the job and believe in the values and mission of the company. Like Steve Jobs once said “do what you love” it is very important for me to love what I do. Provided I like the job I need to connect my traits and skills to the expectation and explain why I can be the best candidate.

In order to connect my traits and skills to the expectation I need to know what my strengths and weakness are. The text book (Leadership Theory and Practice by Northouse) provides good tools to assess our own strengths and weakness. Self-assessment is the first step to self-improvement. Once you know your weakness, you can focus on improving yourself by observing other leaders who are good in that area. It also good idea to have mentors who may provide some insight on how to improve or handle such situations. Feedback from peers and superiors is a good tool to discover things about yourself you may not have noticed.
Also very important to present this explanation in a style that Sandra likes. I will back up my explanations demonstrating my skills or traits through effective situational examples that display my leadership traits and skills.

**How would knowledge of the trait approach to leadership help you with your preparation and application for this position?**

The trait approach to leadership can be helpful first for self-assessment and understanding my strengths and weaknesses. Next knowledge of traits will also help me understand the interviewer and their strengths and style. It is easier to reach your audience when you can explain things in the way they prefer or understand. The knowledge of trait approach not only helps me assess my strengths but also helps me assess other leaders I associate with and learn from them by observing. Understanding the traits required for the position helps me build my application to prove why I will be the best candidate for the position.

**How could you use trait theory in interviewing and selecting the best candidate for the position?**

The trait approach can help identify qualities within the various candidates and help compare one candidate with another. It provides a means to compare the different candidates. Also the traits can be ranked based on what is more important for a specific position. Based on the rank of the trait and the score for a specific candidate on that trait we can create metrics to compare candidates. The trait approach has its own drawbacks there is no adequate study to prove the link between the leadership traits and outcomes and hence must not be considered as the only way of selecting candidates in an interview. It can be one of the criteria in assessing the candidates.

**What are some example questions you might ask the candidates?**

Some of the example questions to ask a candidate are

1. Describe a situation when you’ve demonstrated your leadership by resolving conflicts between different teams and how you’ve accomplished it. (communication and negotiation)

2. Describe a situation when you’ve convinced your superiors on the decision that was profitable for the company and was in alignment with the goals of the company.