

Re: – E04 – Leadership! Google, Guido van Rossum, PSF

Source: <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/Python/comp.lang.python/2006-01/msg00188.html>

- *From:* Jaap Spies <j.spies@xxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Mon, 02 Jan 2006 20:40:39 +0100
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Alex Martelli wrote:

Anton Vredegooor <anton.vredegooor@xxxxxxxx> wrote:
...

only hire people with long
backstabbing histories.

Such as...? Guido van Rossum? Greg Stein?
Vint Cerf? Ben Goodger?

...

No insider information is necessary, the job requirements make it
absolutely clear (at least to me) that Google is a company with an
elitist culture,

Absolutely yes, in terms of who we want to work at Google: we DO want
GREAT people. And we don't keep this a secret, either: right up there
at <<http://www.google.com/jobs/>>, we say "our strategy is simple: we
hire great people". Rather than hiring a LOT of people, we prefer to be
extremely, obsessively selective, and try to hire ONLY a few people,
ones who we can convince ourselves do deserve that adjective, "great".

This does mean that we definitely tend err on the side of caution, and
FAIL to hire some people who are also great, just because we can't
determine with sufficient certainty that they indeed are -- I've seen
this happen more than once, and deeply regret it (for both Google and
the person), but I have no idea how we could do better without relaxing

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our extremely elitist standards (we do debate these issues internally all of the time, trying to do better, but have found no magic wand yet).

But this has nothing to do with "only people with backstabbing histories", which looks like an unsupported, generalized insult.

just like most universities. In fact I am convinced that universities (and this time I have extensive, first person and historic information) are elitist.

No doubt they try to be, mostly (except where governments or other institutions "twist their arms" to force them to admit huge masses of students), but I've met many people with advanced degrees from even the best/most elitist universities, such as Stanford or MIT, where it sure looked to me as if the university's attempts to only graduate the very best have definitely failed.

We can discuss that if you want but to me it's apparant that *titles* are a strong indication of elitism. Further more I am convinced that

Requiring a certain title for a job is mostly a desperate attempt to reduce the huge amount of work and effort it takes to hire great people, whittling down the number of resumes to be considered divided by the number of hires from the high thousands to the low hundreds. If there were available infinite resources for the job of hiring/selection, we could easily interview, say, 6000 candidates for a post, giving each a week or so of concentrated attention to probe their abilities; alas, this would require about 120 person-years from our people for the selection process. So, if nobody at Google did ANYTHING BUT interview candidates, given that we have a bit over 5000 employees now, we could hire in the course of 2006 another 40 or so, without doing anything else. (The numbers are all off the top of my head, but I think they may be roughly the right orders of magnitude).

This is just impractical: we need to hire many more than 40, AND cannot afford to have all existing employees do nothing but select new ones. So, we need to shrink the ratio drastically, on both factors: say 10 instead of 40 hours of selection per candidate, and 50 rather than 6000 candidates being considered per post. So we perform selection in

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stages, and most candidates out of those many thousands-per-job are "weeded out" at the very first stage, e.g. by failing to meet specific qualifications.

I wish that, as you say, "titles" were indeed strong indications of excellence. Unfortunately, they aren't, but in some cases they're better than nothing. Many of our job descriptions, as I pointed out in another post on this thread, say "BS or equivalent experience" or words to that effect; if you can show the "or equivalent", and can get past the first hurdle, then that title is the least of the issues. For example, if we advertised a job requiring "PhD or equivalent", and among the candidates were Bill Gates, Larry Page, and Sergey Brin, none of whom has obtained a PhD to the best of my knowledge, they would surely be able to display the "or equivalent" based on their accomplishments and experience, and thus get past that first hurdle.

uses to discredit paranormal phenomena. For example, careers are "construed" because scientific success is credited to persons higher in the hierarchy and mistakes are the faults of research assistants or students. Only if this system breaks down we see reports of "scientific

Can you show that happening for Guido van Rossum, for example, or Greg Stein? What "hierarchy" were they in, to enable them, as you're accusing, to take credit for accomplishments that are not their own, and deflect blame to poor maligned underlings?

You've made a very specific and insulting claim about Google hiring only people with long histories of backstabbing, and yet it appears that you're failing to substantiate it. Hurling such accusations (ones which obviously must involve specific people, since the whole thread, as indicated by the subject, starts with Guido's working for Google) without being able to provide any substance is, in my strongly held opinion, quite reprehensible, and doesn't reflect well on you.

However for *me* personally, because I am deserted by my government, the university community, friends and family, and left to fend for myself, there is no pressing need to keep up the facade so I can

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finally see it for what it is.

I hope this answers some of your questions about my position. Anyway, I think its better to talk about positive things, like trying to convince google to hire any and all people who can program irrespective of their corruption history.

People who distinguish themselves as outstanding contributors to open-source projects can generally clear the "or equivalent" hurdle without difficulty. Do you consider a history of such contributions to be a "corruption history" and evidence of "backstabbing", too? To emerge as such an outstanding contributor, titles are irrelevant: all you need, besides willingness and ability to invest your time that way, are outstanding technical ability (particularly in design and coding, but testing and debugging are also very important, and so is a knack for writing good documentation -- one can become an "outstanding contributor" through many possible combinations of such skills) AND any of a wide range of suitable character and personality traits.

To focus on the latter: I would never want Google to hire somebody, no matter how great a programmer they might be, who can accuse, for example, Guido van Rossum, of having a "long history of backstabbing", without any substantial data to back up the accusation, just to vent their frustration at their personal situation. You DID say that Google hires ONLY people with long histories of backstabbing, and by the very definition of the word "ONLY" this means you are accusing me, Guido, Greg, etc, etc, of having "long histories of backstabbing" -- and after hurling such insults, and providing NO specific data to support them, you're hallucinating that you can now switch "to talk about positive things"?!

One reason I'm so happy we've hired Guido is that, in addition to his technical excellence, he's just a great guy, wonderful to work with. Technical excellence is a necessary but not sufficient quality: one ALSO needs suitable combinations of character and personality, and Guido has them, in spades. There is an enormous variation of personalities and character traits at Google (we DO value diversity!), but they all have in common the fact that they can combine into small, fluid teams which become even more productive than "the sum of their parts", because teammates LIKE AND RESPECT AND TRUST each other. I do not see how somebody whose behavior included such unsubstantiated "backstabbing" accusations could be productive in this way.

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And, about the job-posting you liked better...:

Run by an engineer, this work environment is a meritocracy. You will be

To me, "meritocracy" and "elitism" are close to being synonyms, in most contexts. "Meritocracy" is defined somewhere on the net as:

""

A system of government whereby a particular standard of ability is used as the basis by which political leadership is determined or accrues to an existing elite.

""

Note the connection with "elite", which in turn gives us "elitism". I do like "meritocracy" because it specifically mentions *ability*, but of course ability (including technical skill, which in turn is enhanced by appropriate experience, AND 'softer' character/personality issues) is what a successful firm bases its "elite" on (or tries to; if it fails, and hires people bereft of sufficient ability, it won't prosper long).

Alex

That all been said. My recommendation: hire that man!

Jaap

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