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Something to Prove

Field Guide preview

Chapter One: The Favor Hire

Explore the opening chapter, worksheets and completed examples.

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Chapter 1

The Favor Hire

The two worksheets in this chapter are about looking before you leap, and then looking back. The first, the favor-hire check, is a short list you run on any finalist for a seat that matters. It takes the four signs from Chapter 1 of the book and makes you write down what you saw and heard, so the decision doesn't rest on how good the résumé looked or how smooth the final interview felt.

The second, your last ten hires, turns the same eye on your own record. You list the last ten people you brought into senior roles, write one line on each and see the pattern. It's the cheapest analysis you'll ever run, and the most uncomfortable.

Neither worksheet is a ban on pedigree. Both are a guard against the trade: hiring pedigree instead of hunger. Keep Figure 01-01 in the book open beside you while you work. Every line on it is about motive and behavior, and so is every line here.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT'S MISSING

You'll know you need these instruments if any of this sounds familiar:

- The finalist everyone liked best is the one whose first questions were about the title, the reporting line and the car.
- Your interview notes describe the candidate's last company in detail and the candidate's own results hardly at all.
- A senior hire gave a great first-ninety-days presentation, a slow second half of the year full of explanations and a gracious resignation letter in the second year, for a bigger title somewhere else.
- Nobody on your team can say, in one sentence, what the open job gives the right person that they can't get anywhere else.
- When you ask why a hire failed, the answer is "bad luck," and nobody has ever written the hire down next to the other nine.

IN THE BOOK

Chapter 1 of *Something to Prove* defines the favor hire: the candidate who joins because of what your company can be on his résumé, or who sees the job as a favor he's doing you. The chapter gives four signs. He talks about the title and the package before the problem. He references his last brand more than his last result. He has never had to build with less than he needed. And he says some version of "I'm here to bring big-company discipline." No one sign is a crime, and one alone may mean nothing. Three or four together, in a candidate for a seat that matters, and you slow down. The rule at the table is narrow and hard: **don't hire pedigree instead of hunger.** The test isn't where someone came from. It's why someone is coming. So the first question about every finalist is "What does this job give this person that they need?" and you write the answer down. Look for the answer only in the work record and in the stories candidates choose to tell, never in their private lives. Chapter 3 gives the full guardrail.

	THE FAVOR HIRE	SOMETHING TO PROVE
Why they come	What you can be on their résumé	What this job lets them become
First questions	Title, package, reporting line	Customers, the problem, the team
How they describe the past	The brand	The result
Experience with scarcity	Rare	Built with less than they needed
What they're proving	Nothing, or to someone else	To themselves
When it gets hard	A phone call to a recruiter	Another day at the work
Typical exit	A bigger title elsewhere	A bigger job here

Fig. 01-01: The favor hire and the person with something to prove often have the same skills. What separates them is why they came and what they do when the work gets hard.

WORKED EXAMPLE: TARRANT

Marcus Hale became CEO of Tarrant Industrial Supply on Monday 5 January 2026. Preston Whitfield, the VP of Sales the previous CEO had hired in June 2024, resigned on Monday 2 February 2026 for a bigger title at a larger company. That afternoon Marcus and Janet Ruiz, Tarrant's VP of People, went through the last ten senior hires on one sheet of paper.

Both worksheets below are filled in from what the book records. Preston was never a villain. He was smart, organized and good company, and he had real ideas about pricing that Marcus wrote down. The hire was the mistake.

Tarrant's worksheet 1 · The favor-hire check

Nobody ran this check when Preston was hired. Here it is run after the fact, on Preston's record, using only what Marcus saw and heard in his first four weeks. It shows what the check would have caught.

Candidate: Preston Whitfield · **Seat:** VP of Sales · **Run by:** Marcus Hale, with Janet Ruiz · **Date:** Monday 2 February 2026

Sign	What we saw or heard	Source	Present?
1. Title and package before the problem	Asked what he wanted to have built at Tarrant in three years, he talked about the next role. Asked what he'd change in the comp plan, he said he had a proposal ready for the Board.	Marcus's January conversations	Yes
2. Last brand more than last result	Brought a new forecast template, a territory model on paper and a ninety-minute weekly pipeline review. Sales were flat for 2025.	Tarrant records; 2025 results	Yes
3. Never built with less than he needed	Fifteen years inside one large conglomerate. No stretch of building with less found in the record. Never rode with a rep in eighteen months. Named the ten largest accounts from a report and couldn't say who bought there.	Résumé; Marcus's January conversations	Yes
4. "Big-company discipline"	Said it, in those words, at his first all-hands. People at Tarrant still quoted it.	All-hands meeting, 2024	Yes

Signs present: 4 of 4.

What does this job give him that he needs? A VP title on the way to the next, bigger one. He took that next one about twenty months after he started, and he left on good terms.

What it would have told us: Slow down. Ask the questions the paper had already answered for us: When did you last win with less than you needed? Who were you trying to prove it to?

Tarrant's worksheet 2 · Your last ten hires

Marcus and Janet worked from Janet's files and her memory. It took a little over an hour. The book names only Preston, so this version names only Preston. Your own sheet will have a name on every line.

Hire	Why they came	Proving what, to whom	What happened	Favor hire?
Preston Whitfield, VP of Sales, June 2024	The VP title; the next role	Nothing in particular, to anyone	Sales flat for 2025; resigned 2 Feb 2026 for a bigger title	Yes
Senior hires 2 and 3	What Tarrant could be on their résumés	Nothing in our building	Each left within two years, for a bigger title	Yes
Senior hire 4	What Tarrant could be on a résumé	Nothing in our building	Still at Tarrant	Yes
Senior hires 5 to 8	Came for the work, not the line on a résumé	Written on Janet's sheet	Still at Tarrant; each runs a part of the business Marcus had already picked out as working	No
Senior hire 9	Came for the work	Written on Janet's sheet	Still at Tarrant	No
Senior hire 10	Came for the work	Written on Janet's sheet	No longer at Tarrant	No

The count:

Group	Hires	Still here	Running a part of the business that works
Favor hires	4	1	—
Not favor hires	6	5	4

The pattern, in one sentence: The hires that worked needed the job for something bigger than the job, and the ones that left were people the job needed more than they needed it.

What we'll do differently: Marcus wrote it at the top of the sheet and taped it inside his desk drawer: *Don't hire pedigree instead of hunger.* Under it, after Janet asked what kind of résumé they should look for instead, he wrote a second line: *Find out who in this building is better than their title.*

What Janet asked for: Something she could score, the same for everybody, built only on the work record and what candidates chose to tell. That condition became the proof process. Chapters 3 and 6 show it.

WORKSHEET 1

The favor-hire check

Turns the four signs into evidence. The CEO or hiring manager fills it in after each finalist's interviews for a seat that matters, with the head of HR. Fifteen minutes per finalist.

1. Fill in one sheet for every finalist for the same seat. Not only the one you're worried about.
2. For each sign, write what you saw or heard and where it came from: the interview, the work sample, the record or a reference. If you can't point to a source, leave the line blank.
3. Mark each sign yes, no or not clear. Count the yeses.
4. Write one sentence answering the question that matters most: what does this job give this person that they need?
5. Three or more yeses, and you slow down: ask the questions the résumé answered for you, and make the reference calls yourself.

Keep to the work. Never write down anything about a candidate's family, health, age, background or private life, and don't score anything personal a candidate volunteers. Worksheet 7 has the full guardrail.

Candidate

Seat

Interviewers

Date

Sign	What we saw or heard	Source	Yes / No / Not clear

The four signs, in order: (1) talks about the title and the package before the problem; (2) references the last brand more than the last result; (3) has never had to build with less than needed; (4) "I'm here to bring big-company discipline," or words to that effect.

Number of signs present (0–4)

What does this job give this person that they need? One sentence.

One stretch in this person's working life when they built with less than they needed (from the record or their own story)

Questions we still have to answer before an offer

Every entry above comes from the work record, the interviews, the work sample or a reference
Nothing personal is written on this sheet
The same check has been run on every finalist for this seat

Completed by

Date

Reviewed by head of HR

Date

Worksheet 2

Your last ten hires

Shows you the pattern in your own hiring. The CEO fills it in with the head of HR, once, in a closed room. About an hour.

1. List the last ten people hired into senior roles: vice presidents, general managers, heads of sales, operations and finance, and branch or plant leaders who run real money. Use the hire date, newest first.
2. For each, write three things on one line: why they came, what they were proving and to whom, and what happened.
3. Mark each one a favor hire or not. Use the definition in the book: joined for what the company could be on their résumé, or saw the job as a favor they were doing you.
4. Count. How many favor hires are still with you? How many of the others are? Who runs the parts of the business that work?
5. Write the pattern in one sentence and what you'll do differently in one more.

This exercise is about the hire, not the person. If a favor hire failed, the mistake was yours or your predecessor's. Say so when you talk about it.

Completed by

With (head of HR)

Date

Hire (role, date)	Why they came	Proving what, to whom	What happened	Favor hire?

Group (favor hires / everyone else)	Number of hires	Still here	Running a part of the business that works

The pattern, in one sentence

What we'll do differently, in one sentence

The sentence I'll put where I'll see it every day

Every line is about the work and why the person came, not about the person's private life
The sheet stays with the CEO and the head of HR

CEO

Date

Head of HR

Date

RUNNING IT WITH A TEAM

Start with worksheet 2, not worksheet 1. Before you change how you judge candidates, look at how you've been judging them. The room is small: you and your head of HR, with the files and a pot of coffee. Nobody else. The point is candor, and candor about past hires is hard with the people who made them sitting at the table. Your head of HR remembers the details you've forgotten and will hold you to the facts. Give it an hour and don't let it run to three. If you need three, you're arguing about people instead of listing hires.

When you're done, show the result, not the sheet, to your leadership team. Say what you learned and say the rule out loud: pedigree is welcome, and it isn't a substitute for hunger. Then put that rule in writing to your recruiters and your search firms. Tell them you'll be running the favor-hire check on every finalist they bring you for a seat that matters, so they can run it first.

Worksheet 1 belongs to every hiring panel for a critical seat. Each interviewer fills in a sheet on their own, the same day, before anyone talks. Then the panel compares. Where two people saw the same sign from different sources,

you've learned something. Where only one person saw it, ask what they heard and write the answer down. The head of HR reads every sheet before it goes in the file and strikes anything personal.

The one mistake to avoid: using the check as a reason to reject anyone with a great résumé. That's the trade in reverse, and it's just as lazy. The favor-hire check tells you to slow down and ask harder questions. It doesn't answer them for you. Some of your best hires will have gone to the best schools and worked at the best companies, and wanted to find out whether they could build something without the brand behind them. Hire them, and thank your luck.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR MONDAY

1. For each open senior role, what does the job give the right person that they can't get anywhere else? Can you say it in one sentence?
2. Which of your last ten senior hires came for what your company could be on their résumé, and where are they now?
3. Who in your company is better than their title, and who on your leadership team would know?

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

- [ ] We've filled in worksheet 2 for our last ten senior hires and counted the favor hires
- [ ] Our head of HR has seen the pattern and agrees with the count
- [ ] Every open senior role has a one-sentence answer to "What does this job give the right person that they need?"
- [ ] Our recruiters have it in writing that pedigree is welcome and is not a substitute for hunger
- [ ] Worksheet 1 is in the interview packet for every finalist for a seat that matters
- [ ] We've asked each leader, one at a time, who in the company is better than their title, and written down every name