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What skills to look for when hiring for a family office?

In a world of hyper-specialization, family offices operate differently. Family offices need generalists. They need someone who isn't just a tax expert, an investment strategist, or an estate planner—they need someone who can think across all of these areas. Someone who understands how everything fits together

Enter the generalist. This isn't a traditional role. It's about having the breadth to see patterns, to connect the dots, and to anticipate issues before they become problems. A good generalist understands investing. A great generalist understands how an investment today impacts cash flow, estate planning, tax efficiency, and the family's long-term vision.

Why family offices need generalists:

Most wealth creators don't build their fortune by being generalists. They're highly focused individuals—experts in building a business, trading commodities, or making the right deals at the right time. But once that wealth is created, managing it is an entirely different game. An entrepreneurial skillset is not always best suited to preserving wealth.

Family offices are dynamic, complex ecosystems where every decision is interconnected. When a family member wants to invest in a new venture, it doesn't just impact their portfolio—it affects liquidity, estate planning, tax exposure, and family governance.

Generalists don't necessarily have all the answers themselves, but they know the right questions to ask, they know the right people to talk to. They can translate legal jargon into real-world implications, see risks that others miss, and understand how seemingly unrelated issues influence one another. David Epstein's *Range* argues that generalists thrive in complex, unpredictable environments—exactly what a family office is.

Unlike the corporate world, where specialists operate in silos, a family office needs someone who can operate across disciplines. Six traits of a great family office generalist:

- Adaptability Over Expertise
- Pattern Recognition
- The Art of Asking the Right Questions
- Strong EQ (Emotional Intelligence)
- A Translator Between Worlds
- Decisiveness in the Face of Uncertainty

Where to find the generalists

They're not easy to find. Traditional career paths don't train for this. But the best generalists often come from diverse backgrounds—lawyers who pivoted to finance, operators who ran businesses before stepping into wealth management, or even those who started in entirely unrelated fields before moving into the family office space

What does a great generalist have?

With the advent of AI, Intelligence is on tap now so agency is even more important. Agency > Intelligence. Due to a pervasive cultural veneration of intelligence, various entertainment/media, obsession with IQ etc. Agency is significantly more powerful and significantly scarcer. Are you hiring for agency? Are we educating for agency? Are you acting as if you had 10X agency?

"Agency, as a personality trait, refers to an individual's capacity to take initiative, make decisions, and exert control over their actions and environment. It's about being proactive rather than reactive—someone with high agency doesn't just let life happen to them; they shape it. Think of it as a blend of self-efficacy, determination, and a sense of ownership over one's path.

People with strong agency tend to set goals and pursue them with confidence, even in the face of obstacles. They're the type to say, "I'll figure it out," and then actually do it. On the flip side, someone low in agency might feel more like a passenger in their own life, waiting for external forces—like luck, other people, or circumstances—to dictate what happens next.

It's not quite the same as assertiveness or ambition, though it can overlap. Agency is quieter, more internal—it's the belief that you *can* act, paired with the will to follow through. Psychologists often tie it to concepts like locus of



control: high-agency folks lean toward an internal locus, feeling they steer their fate, while low-agency folks might lean external, seeing life as something that happens *to* them.”

The best indicator of a great generalist?

Someone who’s worked across industries, built a diverse skill set, and thrives in ambiguity. Someone who doesn’t just see the big picture but knows how to connect it. In a world that increasingly rewards specialization, family offices remain one of the last places where true generalists not only survive but thrive. And for families who understand their value, they’re the single best investment they can make.

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