Consider for a moment what it takes for someone to standout from their peer group as a potential candidate. Take a technical environment where there is a high degree of skill or knowledge required to do the job such as a software developer.

When you look at what software engineers do, it is impressive. Looking at the studies and time it has taken them to develop their skills they can all seem good.

It is important that you don't fall into the trap of assuming that everyone must be good at what they do, just because they've been doing it for so long or because it is a complex job to do.

In every profession (yours included) there are individuals who are exceptional and those who are below average. Your job is to assess how good the candidate you are talking to, compared to the job in question and the peer group you're also assessing and qualifying.

It is a mistake to assume that tenure creates capability. Someone with 5 years' experience is not automatically better than someone with 3. Clients will make the mistake of briefing agencies based upon the years' experience candidates should possess. Hidden in this is the real hiring requirement – the assumption the client has as to what someone with 5 years' experience can do that those with 3 cannot.

Achievements is what helps candidates to shine out from their peers

To assess achievements is a very simple process. In fact you only need to learn one question and the focus on listening to the answer to pull through the details:

> "Thinking back over the last 12 months, what are you most proud of that you've achieved at work?"

The question ensures the evidence is recent and is from a work environment.

As you listen, you will hear an achievement if it ticks one of the components in the acronym

SAM

Saved – The candidate may have saved the company from a bad event, protected them from loss, saved money, reduced time on core tasks, developed systems to increase efficiency or rescued a customer

Accomplished – Your candidate may have been awarded a prize, been recognized by the CEO, completed a major project, steadied a failing team, opened a new income stream, been promoted

Made – Candidates may have made systems, processes, new programmes, audits, training content, new products, refinements through Kanban, or simply made money for the business

When you find the achievements that are relevant to the role in question and elevate your candidate from their peers, you could well be talking to a future placement.

Get the detail – if your candidate claims to have saved money then quantify it.

If your candidate says they delivered a big project then get the scale, scope and timescales.

When you start to find people's achievements (every has something they think is an achievement) you are often taking about something they're proud of. It helps deepen rapport and understanding.

If the achievement isn't on the CV then you now have detail your competitors are unlikely to have (like many things in recruitment, all recruiters know about the power of achievement discovery yet less tan 50% ask consistently).

Extend your achievement qualification skills further by using the STAR technique to pull through a powerful evidence stack to convince a client to interview your contender.