



The Readers have spoken. HELP

Don't rush into hiring a new employee, think of it as an investment.

Yes, I get a lot of e-mails every month (and I do answer every one). These e-mails cover the gamut: I get compliments (thank you), disagreement, corrections (oops), and questions. Some articles prompt more e-mails than others. The article about hiring the right person and avoiding employee churn resonated with many readers.

From these e-mails, I know that hiring, training and retaining the right employees are some of the more challenging tasks facing a PVF warehouse. The world has changed, and yet when faced with hiring, we go back to our strongest reference point — our own experience. We remember our first job searches, interviews and jobs. We remember being mentored (if we were lucky) or not by someone on the job. Most of us have NO memory of responding to ads on *Monster.com*, or being called in for numerous interviews. I know I was never given anything that even vaguely resembles a “job description” or training in my first few positions.

It should come as no surprise then, that people (us!) find recruiting and hiring very uncomfortable. And as with all uncomfortable tasks, we do our very best to avoid it, or at least we try to get it over with quickly. One person wrote, “I read your article and it all makes sense — but I still don't know how to go about finding good employees and once found, how to insure they stay.”

Another wrote a particularly honest note and plea, “I hate interviewing, I don't know how — I just want someone to walk in the door so I can hire him. I know that's not the way to go. HELP.”

First, finding good employees takes time. The biggest error most companies make is to make their hiring decision on the fly, in desperation. An employee has left, quit, disappeared — and suddenly you have ‘a hole’ in your organization. Your immediate and urgent aim is to “fill the hole” as soon as possible. Make the goal to fill the position in X months (the time frame is shorter for laborers and longer for management positions.)

Think of hiring someone as an investment, the same as buying a new truck, installing new software

or building an extension to your warehouse. It pays to devote some time to this endeavor. You need to “shop and compare.” Hiring the wrong person is a total waste of time and resources. You know they'll be gone soon enough (voluntarily or not) and leave that big hole in your organization unfilled once again. In order to resist urgency, treat hiring a new person like a project — create a timeline, milestones and a budget. Map out what you are going to do step by step. Break the project down into its basic components: recruiting, first cut, interviewing, selection, the offer/negotiation.

Job Description

Before you place ads everywhere, write a job description. It doesn't have to be exhaustive, but should detail the primary tasks and responsibilities. Set minimum requirements for consideration. This can include years of experience, bi-lingual, computer literate, college degree, truck license, etc. Ask the folks who will be working with the new hire for their thoughts — who knows better what the job “really” entails? Now, you can write a targeted ad.

Recruiting

(Run ads two weeks for warehouse help, two months for a manager and longer for a VP)

Place ads in trade magazines, *Monster.com*, *craigslist.org* and local papers. Extend your reach — post your ad in at least one new classified place. Don't get caught up in doing the same old, same old: “We post the same ad in the same places and we get the same (bad) results.” You will want to search for warehouse help for at least two weeks, managers at least two months and VPs even longer.

First Cut

If you have written a good ad and placed it in some good classified space, you should receive a nice stack of resumes. The first cut should be easy — many resumes will not fulfill your minimum requirements. Of those remaining, select the top candidates (3 to 10) and invite them in for an interview. (Yes, you need to do this for a warehouse guy.)

Interviewing

■ Have at least two people interview the candidates and write up a brief assessment of the candidate.

■ Prepare interview questions ahead of time (this is VERY important).

The interview is when you get to learn if the candidate is a “fit” for your company — these are subjective feelings, things that you won’t be able to ascertain from the resume. The more time you spend listening to the candidates, the more you will learn. This is the hardest part.

As interviewers and representatives of our company, we *want* the person to like us and our company, we *want* them to come and work for us, leading us to devote much of the interview time to promoting the company and trying to convince the prospective employee that they would be fools not to want to come work for us.

So what’s wrong with following this normal human tendency? Basically if you are busily selling your company to the prospect, you can’t possibly be examining the prospect. Your job is to extract as much information as possible from the person sitting in front of you. You want to know about his skills, his work experience, how he handles ambiguity, why she left her last job, why she thinks she is a good candidate for this job. In short, he or she needs to be doing the majority of the talking. Ask some of those cringe-worthy interview questions and listen:

- “Tell me about a past accomplishment of which you are the most proud.”
- “Describe your style when working in a team.”
- “How do you handle frustration/failure?”
- “What do you think is your biggest

weakness and what are you doing to overcome it?”

■ “Why do you want to work for a small/local/large company?”

■ “Do you feel you like lots of management, a little guidance or none at all?”

■ “Describe your working relationship with your last boss and why did it work (or not)?”

This is a lot harder to do than promoting your company. Prepare a list of questions. If you can’t think of more than a few, visit the University of Texas’ Web site: <http://web.austin.utexas.edu/architecture/resources/career/100qs.html> for 100 interview questions. The moral of the interview story is harsh and simple. If your mouth is moving, you’re not listening. If you’re not listening, you’re not learning anything about the prospect.

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■ Ask each candidate to demonstrate competency.

■ Ask him or her to type a memo or input sales numbers into an Excel spreadsheet.

■ Ask warehouse candidate to fetch something off a top shelf with

the forklift.

■ Whatever the position is, find some way to test the minimum required skill level.

Selection

■ After the first round, assess the

candidates and decide whom to call back (2 – 4 people).

■ Write the others a brief note — “Thanks for coming in. At this time, we are not able to extend you an offer...” Don’t blow them off!!! You may be calling them back in a month or three.

■ Re-interview the select few.

■ Now, you should be able to decide whom to hire. (If no one looks right — by all means don’t hire.)

Negotiation and Offer

■ Given the individual’s qualifications, you should be able to present him or her with an offer.

■ There may be a negotiation phase, particularly for the higher level hires. You may want to do a little comparative research on salary packages for management positions before making an offer.

Now you have a new hire. One who looks like a good fit, has at least the minimum competency levels to perform the job and beat out all the others. You’ve invested a lot of time and effort into this hire — so don’t lose them in the first few weeks! Make sure that when they start, you are ready for them. They need to know clearly what their job is, to whom they report and the career advancement path. Be sure to check on them — set up quarterly reviews for the first year — make sure to check in on them frequently. <<

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