

## MAJOR HIRING MISTAKES - & HOW TO AVOID THEM

INTERVIEWING AND HIRING THE BEST "TALENT" FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION IS PROBABLY YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TASK. YOU CAN'T EXPECT GREAT EMPLOYEES TO FIND YOU AND ALSO THERE IS A NASTY FEELING WHEN YOU COME TO KNOW AFTER A FEW DAY THE HIRE IS A WRONG ONE. TO ATTRACT EXCEPTIONAL EMPLOYEES, ESTABLISH A WELL THOUGHT OUT RECRUITING PLAN TO IDENTIFY, TARGET, AND REACH THEM. WITHOUT PLANS, THERE WOULD BE NO EXECUTION & HENCE FAILURES WHICH CAN BE RECTIFIED.....

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1. Relying strictly on traditional recruiting sources. If you're still putting an ad in the paper and hoping for the best, says Gevity, get with it. There is a wide range of options beyond that, including online job boards, university job fairs, recruiters and employment agencies, and your own website. More and more organizations report that many or most of their hires come from Internet-based sources. The reason: That's where many of the best people are looking for new jobs. The referral system doesn't bring in many duds—employees know the people they refer, and they don't want to be the one responsible for bringing a bad apple into the company.

2. Offering candidates uncompetitive compensation. That doesn't mean just cash. Benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans, opportunities for growth and advancement, a



positive work environment, and flexibility also play a large role. "Always focus the prospective hire on the total package".

3. Failing to market your company. Remember, while you are evaluating candidates, they are evaluating you. Treat them with respect. With the best candidates, add a strong "sell" segment to the interview. Showcase your organization's strengths, opportunities, and positive culture. Tailor your "sell" to what the applicant has revealed about what he or she is looking for in a new job.

4. Waiting until someone leaves—or is long gone — to fill critical positions. Turnover happens. "Build a talent pipeline,". Then when a position opens, you can fill it quickly with top talent. No more treading water while you wait for the recruiting wheels to turn.

5. Hiring solely on job fit, not organization fit. Most managers tend to focus on "job fit," but research shows that organization fit is often more important. **You can teach skills but not attitude, many experts say.** Besides, this we need to find "future fit" as well. What skills might a candidate bring to the organization that will also add to future openings, and when might those skills be needed? Organization fit should always be broad enough to include diversity that makes an organization dynamic and able to change and grow.



## 6. **Overly-narrow job specifications**

Every manager is in a rush because his project is behind schedule and unanticipated problems have cropped up. When a manager needs to add staff, it's usually because he needs the *right help* and he doesn't have time to baby-sit whoever he hires. The manager needs *specific skills now*.

This attitude is at the root of overly-narrow job specifications, and it can spell doom for the manager, for the new hire, and for the work.

**People are thinking and problem-solving machines.** They see, they analyze, they learn and they marshal their skills, abilities and knowledge to tackle and do a job. This is what you're paying for when you hire a good worker: his abilities, not his specific knowledge of a technique or a tool. Almost by definition, **a good worker can learn to use any tool you hand him, and he might even introduce a few tools you were unaware existed.** When a person lacks some specific skills, a little guidance and a stack of manuals go a long way.

You need specific expertise *now*? The odds that you'll find it are small, especially in a tight market. The cost of leaving the work undone until you find **EXACTLY** what you want grows by the minute. The value of hiring a talented worker and giving him the space to learn while he works increases with time, from the first minute he is on your staff.

There's nothing wrong with clearly defining the work you need to have done. Just don't make the mistake of overly-narrowing your definition of who can do it, and don't make the mistake of turning a project management problem into a hiring blunder. A



manager who hires narrowly may be viewed as one who doesn't understand the broader requirements of the technology and products he's working with -- and enough hiring blunders can cost him his own job.

### **7. Human Resources do the recruiting**

Consider that the person who first talks to a prospective hire is your company's front line of communication with your professional community. What does an HR representative -- even the best one in your company -- really know about the work your department does?

As an example, if your company is in the electronics industry, an engineer needs to see your company's technical and management credibility immediately. The closer to the recruiting process the engineering manager is, the more powerful is the attraction for the engineer. Don't make the prospective technical candidate step through bureaucracy before you have a chance to make your pitch. In today's market, you could lose him to an employer who makes a full-court press from the onset of the recruiting effort.

What does this mean to your recruiting process? Turn your managers and team members into recruiters. Let them be the people who make the first contact with the candidate. Let your team create the candidate's first impression of your company. Show the candidate that hiring the best people is as important a function to your team as designing the best products (or having the highest sales, or applying the smartest budget management practices).

### **8. Hiring "what comes along"**



The traditional recruiting and hiring process is based on a faulty selection model. When you run ads and hold job fairs, you create what's referred to in the research world as "selection bias". That is, the process you use biases the outcome of your search for new employees. You get to hire only the people who come along, not those you would like to hire.

Since when is your company's motto, **HIRE WHAT COMES ALONG?**

When you retain a headhunter, you change the nature of your hiring strategy. You pursue the best workers who are most suited to your needs; you're not restricted to "what comes along". Of course, regular readers of this column know that there's no mystery to "[being your own headhunter](#)" -- so this is not an advertisement for headhunting services. The message here is that you should be keenly aware of the consequences of the process you use to recruit and hire. You're probably limiting yourself more severely than you suspect.

A special caution: today we're told the best job candidates are part of a "hidden candidate pool". That is, they're not looking, but they're available. (It kind of sounds like the flipside of that other employment industry phantom, the "hidden job market," doesn't it?) The popular oxymoron applied to these rare folks is "passive job hunter". In trying to describe that group of talented workers who are not actively looking for new jobs, the media (and their associated recruitment advertising services) imply that these people really *are* available through conventional means, and that they're the right people for you. All you need is access to their vitals, which just happen to be in a data base which you can use for a fee. The problem is, these data bases --



no matter how specialized -- introduce the same selection bias into your hiring efforts.

Bottom line: either you are identifying and pursuing those individuals you would like to hire, or you're shooting at the fish that are conveniently -- and rather naively -- swimming in a little barrel. So, run ads if you will. But, be aware that employers who identify, hunt down and entice the workers they really want have a jump on you.

### **9. Failure to prep the candidate**

The typical job candidate arrives at the job interview knowing only what's printed in the want ad, and what your HR representative told her. What a great way to evaluate a prospective employee -- make it as much a "blind date" as possible! If she asks to speak with the hiring manager in advance of the interview, tell her "that's not done" and that "the manager is very busy -- you'll learn all you need in the interview". In fact, when she asks the name of the manager she'll be meeting next week, you might as well do what a lot of companies do: decline to give it to her.

What nonsense. It's in a hiring manager's best interest to help the candidate prepare for the interview -- at least to the extent the candidate is interested in doing so. In fact, a candidate's lack of interest in the prep material or information you offer should signal that this is probably the wrong candidate to devote interview time to.

What kind of preparation should you offer and encourage? That's up to you. But consider this: a candidate who makes good use of whatever resources you bestow prior to the interview will

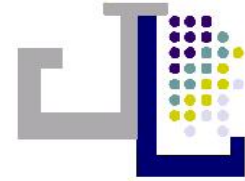


likely make as good use of the tools your department provides once she's on the job. It's a very telling test.

Here are some suggestions for prep materials. Prior to bringing the candidate in for an interview, offer her non-confidential information about:

- your products and technologies
- relevant but not-so-obvious web pages that might be useful
- the problems and challenges your team is facing
- industry issues that impact your business
- the tools your team uses
- methods you employ in project management
- competitors and vendors you deal with
- articles about your company that illuminate how you run the business
- historical information about your products and your company's growth
- organizational information about how various departments work together
- financial and profitability data, if your company is public (or maybe even if it's not)
- the names and telephone numbers of members of your staff (why not?)

Treat the job interview as an open-book test, and give the candidate the book before the interview. Let her talk with you on the phone; let her talk to some of your team members; let her ask questions in advance. If you offer and she doesn't bother, you've learned something important. If she takes



advantage of the information, imagine how fruitful the interview could be. You could talk about things that really matter -- like how the candidate can use what she has learned to make your business more profitable.

#### **10. Failure to leverage the interview into other useful contacts**

Human resources reps sometimes ask job candidates to recommend or refer their professional associates for other possible jobs; but it's different coming from the hiring manager. Hiring managers should learn to do this all the time.

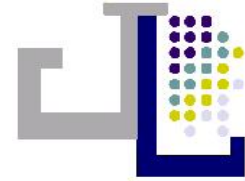
Here you are, meeting with a member of your professional community "from out there" in the industry. This is a person who knows lots of other sales reps, programmers, technicians, accountants, engineers, production workers -- lots of the kinds of people your company is seeking to hire. If you're not discreetly mining this information, you're wasting a valuable opportunity in the interview.

Suggestion: don't just gather these names. Invite the candidate and his buddies to your next company event. Don't have an event coming up? *Start* having them. Lots of them. Whether it's a barbecue, a picnic, a bag lunch featuring a presentation by a company expert, a hospitality suite at the next product fair, or beers at the local watering hole after work on Friday -- this is how you enlarge your circle of professional contacts. And it's how you identify more of the kinds of people you want to hire *before you need to hire them*.

#### **11. Talk, talk, talk**

The single biggest mistake to make in an interview is to spend it





all talking. Talk is cheap, and it's a waste of time by itself. Instead, take the candidate on the company tour. Introduce him to other employees. Explain how the marketing manager does his job and let the candidate chat with him. Tour the manufacturing floor and let the candidate demonstrate how he would inspect the production line. Show him the tools he'll be using if he's hired. Ask him to show you how he'd use a particular piece of equipment, or ask him to draw some pictures on your whiteboard showing how he'd plan his day and how he'd tackle a project.

**A job is about DOING, not talking. Make sure the interview is about doing the job.**

## **12. Inadequate reference checks**

In too many companies, reference checks are entirely inadequate. HR usually conducts them, using a carefully orchestrated, one-sided protocol. Yes, there are legal issues, and these must be addressed. But it's the hiring manager who should conduct these checks, after being taught how to do it right.

A reference call from one manager to another is very different from a call from an HR rep. Managers can delve into more detail, and they have both the expertise and the prerogative to pursue lines of questioning that HR lacks. Peers are more likely to be open and blunt with one another.

There's one critical question that comes across as much more profound when the hiring manager asks it, at the end of the reference call: "If you could have Joe work on your team again, would you hire him?" While the answer matters, it's the



hesitation or the enthusiasm of the respondent that's critical. Manager to manager, this one question can reveal more than any other kind of reference check.

When you're hiring, don't pay lip service to the importance of reference checking. Involve the people who will work with the new hire.

### **13. Unreasonably long decision process**

We know something that job candidates hate, and that most employers are too busy to think about. **THE LONGER AN EMPLOYER TAKES TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE, THE LESS LIKELY THE CANDIDATE IS TO BE HIRED.** The advice I regularly give job hunters: judge the company on how it sticks to the decision schedule it gives you. If they fail more than once to meet the notification deadlines they themselves have set, start talking to other employers, because there's likely a profound management problem that you can't see.

Companies lose good candidates when they hesitate to make decisions. Granted, the interview and decision process takes time. But there is no excuse for not having a decision schedule and sticking to it. The price you pay for treating your hiring process indecisively and your candidates disrespectfully is a [bad reputation](#).

Set a hiring and decision schedule and stick to it. If you can't decide on a candidate, then call the candidate and tell him you have no plans to make an offer at this time. (Only the hiring manager should make this call -- there's no excuse for having an intermediary in HR do it, unless the hiring manager is in the



hospital. How would you feel if your fiancé had a friend call to tell you the wedding was off?)

Bite the bullet. Be honest. Be responsible. Afraid you'll lose the candidate? Then, why are you hesitating to hire him? Don't blame bureaucracy or other factors: either you're ready to hire or you're not, and either this is the right candidate or he's not. Hire him or cut him loose on schedule. You'll keep his respect.

### **13. Leaving your team out of the loop**

Before I send candidates to interview, I coach them to request meetings with members of the team they'd be working in; with managers of departments they'd be interfacing with; and always with the heads of marketing and service. Why? Because a candidate's ability to succeed in the job (if he's hired, of course) depends intimately on the way these people act, think and work. No worker -- and no job -- is an island. Why treat them that way when hiring?

Time and again, people who have just started a job share tales of woe. "The rest of the team is quitting one by one. There's no cooperation between departments. Sales aren't what they said they were. The job isn't what I was told." Within weeks if not days, the new hire is interviewing for another job with another company.

As a manager, you're not hiring a person to work on an island. His work, his behavior and his attitudes will impact everyone in your department, and everyone he interfaces with throughout the company. Given the opportunity, each of these "interfaces" will reveal aspects of the candidate you would never see yourself. Don't leave them out of the interview loop.



It's not necessary to schedule formal interviews for the candidate with all these people. You can easily engage in a little "interviewing by wandering around". While on the cook's tour of the facility, arrange a little "face time" in relevant areas throughout the company. Leave the candidate to chat for a few minutes with the people you encounter on your tour. Arrange a product demonstration, or let the candidate sit in on a project meeting for a few minutes -- and have the other team members ask his opinions. Make it easy and casual, but make sure the people you involve in this process are prepared to conduct mini-interviews and report back to you.