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Consultants for Leadership Selection

Ten Common Hiring Mistakes

By Bruce Dingman

Hiring the wrong person is one of the biggest mistakes management can make. Here are tips on what **not** to do.

Not checking references...is probably the most common mistake. Prepare a list of questions for the candidate to answer, and then ask the same questions of their references. Check references from bosses, close peers (co-workers), and subordinates if possible.

Hiring who is handy...is often an easy way, but not the best way. The "Peter Principle" (a person will keep being promoted until they reach a level of incompetence) often occurs because hiring or promoting someone who is known and liked is easy.

Not defining personality or management style desired...may mean, otherwise good candidates do not fit. Oftentimes people are hired because they have the right experience, but that alone is not sufficient. Maybe they held the right job but were not very good at it. Maybe their management style will not fit your team.

Not applying enough resources...doing a search in-house may produce a few quality candidates but possibly not the right one. Be sure that whoever is conducting the search has the time and budget to do the search well. Adding the search responsibility on top of someone's already full schedule, may not give the quality of results desired.

Hiring too quickly...even when recommended by a friend, hiring that candidate can be a mistake. Do not fail to do the proper due diligence on a candidate. Check references thoroughly and verify degrees. Don't let pressures to fill the job quickly cause you to make mistakes.

Hiring the only candidate...is hiring from weakness. The person is good compared to whom? Ideally, there should be three to four candidates who have the right experience, education, compensation needs, and management style. Out of the group, hopefully two are highly desired and can be attracted. Then select the best one...that is hiring from a position of strength.

Not hiring for future needs...means the company may soon outgrow the person's talents. Even when it takes more than the budgeted compensation range to attract the person the company will need within two years, do it. That is better than having to fill the position again.

Failing to court the candidate...may mean no marriage! The "getting to know you" process should not be just a one-sided two-hour interview. Give the candidate a chance to ask about your organization. Realize you are marketing yourself and your firm to them just as much as they should be to you. Clear your calendar so you can focus on them rather than giving them an impression that they are an interruption in your busy day.

Not taking time for lunch or dinner... the more casual environment will often show parts of the candidate's personality that did not appear during the formal interview.

Making the hiring decision in a vacuum...can produce unpleasant surprises. If the circumstances permit, allow the selected candidate to meet their peers and subordinates before being hired. Perhaps these people might raise some red flags you want to know about before it is a done deal. If not, then at least they are more likely to be supportive of the hiring because their input was sought out. Moreover, for the candidate, it gives them a better chance to understand the culture and the quality of the team.

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