

Guaranteeing Hiring Success

Tips on Recruiting, Screening, Interviewing, Testing, and Reference Checking

Time is the most critical factor in hiring today. Spend too long on your hiring process, and you'll lose top candidates. Spend too little time, and you may make the most costly mistake of all—a bad hire. The secret is to spend enough time, while using the proper tools, to make the right fit between the candidate and the company.

This article highlights the benefits of improving your hiring process, and gives you an assortment of tools to help you make your hiring decisions. Once you've set up a process to recruit, assess, and interview potential job candidates, you can *guarantee* your hiring success.

Creative Recruiting Strategies

Michael Pehl, CEO of i-Cube, takes out billboards touting his company as "An Incredible Place to Work."

He also relies on unusual referral bonuses like a 32-inch television, a year's worth of housekeeping services, and even a new Jeep Wrangler for employees referring eight candidates in a year!

Linda Blaser, a contract recruiter for Exchange Applications, gives a \$2,500 bonus to anyone referring a candidate—customers, vendors, even strangers!

Recruiting

In today's tight labor market, just finding the right people to interview can be a major challenge. You should seek every opportunity to locate potential applicants. While print advertising has remained the primary recruiting medium for most organizations, an analysis of costs have led many companies to seek additional methods. The following practices are some of the most popular and effective recruiting methods companies are using today:

Recruit applicants even when you're not hiring.

Develop a contact database of people you're interested in.

Partner with a skilled staffing service to recruit for you.

Redesign jobs to take advantage of available talent.

Encourage referrals—make your company the best place to work.

Use temp-to-hire options with a staffing service to "test out" before you commit to hiring.

Go global: can your work be done by someone across town, across the country, or across the world?

Use on-line career fairs to gain exposure to more applicants.

Post job openings on your company's web site.

Fill in with temporary clerical, technical, professional, or executive staff while you look.

Recruiting is a sales job—why would a top quality applicant buy your firm? Once you answer this question, you'll be better prepared to face the challenges involved in finding good candidates.

Test for Commitment

How much does a candidate want to work for you?

Ask them to visit your workplace before the interview. Let them know you'll be asking for their observations and recommendations for improvement. The more seriously they take this assignment, the more they are committed to working for you.

Ask them to fill out an in-depth employment application. Test them on whatever skills are necessary for the job—business writing, customer service, or data analysis. If you can tell they put a lot of effort into filling out the application, you'll get an idea of how committed they'll be once you hire them!

Candidate Assessment

Once you've selected the people you want to interview, the real challenge begins. Interviewing should be thought of as a process. Take your time getting to know the candidate—through screening, interviewing, testing, and reference checking. Your goal is to get an understanding of a person's behavior—and the more chances you have to learn about the person, the more likely you are to get a true sense of their personality, ability, and behavior.

Screening

Once you've found a way to locate applicants, you need to screen resumes to make sure you interview the right candidates for your open positions. How many good people have you passed over because nothing on their resume caught your eye? Unfortunately, the answer is you'll never know—unless you catch them working for your competition because they saw potential where you didn't! Use the following techniques to improve your screening process:

Work in teams to gain more insight into a candidate's strengths and weaknesses.

Use a resume scoring system to compare candidates.

Telephone pre-screen—don't rely solely on resumes.

Interviewing

Dr. Pierre Mornell, author of *Hiring Smart*, states three basic assumptions about interviewing: 1. Interviews test how well someone interviews; 2. A good con artist can fool you every time; and 3. Interviews in which you induce stress seldom work. Additionally, he offers a few strategies to improve your interviewing technique.

First, he suggests asking a series of initial questions at once, then allowing the candidate to answer them all. The reason is, it forces you to listen, and it relaxes you. Once you know your part is over for a while, you can focus on the candidate's answers more intently. He also suggests you announce when the interview will end—by saying something like, "we've got five more minutes." This usually prompts the candidate to say the most important thing about him or herself—Mornell calls these "last minute revelations."

Finally, Mornell suggests throwing in a curveball at the end of the interview by doing something unexpected. He often walks people to their cars. He observes the make, model, interior, or anything else which shows something about the candidate's personal side. One candidate he did this with had left his wife in the car—for the whole two-hour interview. This action spoke volumes to Mornell, who did not recommend the candidate for a position. The company hired him anyway, only to have to let him go less than a year later because of his poor relationships with female coworkers.

**Dr. Pierre Mornell's
Estimated Cost
of a Bad Hire**

"If you make a mistake in hiring, and you recognize and rectify the mistake within six months, the cost of replacing the employee is two and a half times the person's annual salary. Put another way, hiring the wrong person earning \$40,000 will cost your company \$100,000...and that doesn't include the emotional costs."

**Confessions from
CEOs Who've Made
Hiring Mistakes**

"My bad hire was the third choice after two others were not hired. I compromised because the search was taking inordinately long. Now I know that no hire is better than a bad hire."

"My hiring compromise cost me the company."

Assessment

Beyond the interview, if you want to gain a better understanding of a candidate's personality, ability, and/or skills, you should test him or her. In the 1950s, assessment testing was all the rage. But, with Civil Rights legislation of the '60s, and affirmative action programs of the '70s, assessment fell out of favor. However, it is once again gaining popularity as companies realize they can reduce turnover costs by hiring right the first time—which makes testing for fit an important tool in the hiring process.

Personality tests give you an idea of a candidate's inherent behavioral traits.

Skills and ability tests are an excellent way to determine how well the applicant will perform on the job.

Reference Checking

After you've screened, interviewed, and tested, you need to check references of the people you would consider hiring. This is the key to determining a person's past performance. And remember, the past is a very good indicator of the future. You're looking for a pattern of behavior. Use the following tips to find out how well a candidate performed for previous employers, and whether weaknesses you've uncovered in the interviewing process are accurate.

Ask the candidate what you will hear. You'll give the candidate the opportunity to tell you his or her side of the story if they expect to get a less than glowing recommendation from a past employer.

Call references at times when you can leave a voice mail message. Leave a message stating that you're calling for a reference, and ask to be called back only if the candidate was outstanding. If you don't hear back from most of the people you call, you'll get the message loud and clear. The main benefit is you don't have to worry about the legal issues associated with employers afraid to give out poor references.

Ask references for a reference. Often, one person removed from the given reference will provide the best information.

The way to guarantee your hiring success is to hire right in the first place—and that takes time. To save time, and help guarantee your success, consider working with a staffing service. A staffing partner can take care of recruiting, screening, preliminary interviewing, testing, and/or reference checking. Spend your time wisely. Concentrate on getting to know the candidate—including past performance, personality, and skills. You'll be better equipped to make the right decision. The more attention you pay to your hiring process, the better results you'll get, because nothing benefits a business more than having the right people working there.

Sources:

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