

RECRUITING FOR SUCCESSFUL HIRES

Although the tight market of the recent past may be slowing some, hiring the right person remains of the utmost importance. With the right individual you gain an obvious asset to your team and avoid the risks associated with hiring the wrong person. These risks include possible exposure to a lawsuit claiming wrongful discharge, reduced morale of other staff members and the costs associated with lost productivity, training, missed opportunities and additional recruiting time.

While we all want to avoid these risks, at the same time there should be no cutting corners in your efforts to find the right new hire as there are legal requirements imposed to ensure that you hire in a lawful fashion. Here are some steps to ensure a nondiscriminatory process that will get you the right candidate:

PREPARATION

Consider the possibility of interviewing as a panel of two to five individuals. Better ideas are often generated in crafting interview questions and different perspectives can be considered when making the hiring decision. There can be an added bonus when colleagues or subordinates of the new hire are included, i.e. they feel more appreciated by virtue of their input being sought and there is greater “buy-in” regarding the final choice.

Analyze the job and be sure to identify the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors that would be critical to successful performance. A good place to start is with the job description, assuming it is recent and accurate, but you should also think about incumbents to identify the specific qualities that contribute to their performance and give thought to qualifications the ideal candidate would possess.

Screen candidates by reviewing applications and resumes. Ensure that all minimums are met, and look for clues to successful performance, e.g. writing style, required experience, typos, degree of professionalism, etc. Select at least three candidates to interview.

Prepare for the interview process by carefully devising a list of questions to ask each candidate. Questions should always be defensibly job-related. It is crucial to avoid questions that relate directly or indirectly to age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, sexual preference, marital status, pregnancy or disabilities. For example, you may not inquire about an applicant’s workers’ compensation history, nor whether an applicant has a disability. You may ask if there is anything that precludes the applicant from performing the essential functions of the job for which he or she is applying. Asking the same basic questions of all candidates allows for good comparison and a fair process.

After basic skills and qualifications have been determined, interview questions should facilitate discussion as well as elicit from candidates past behaviors and situations that demonstrate the desired behaviors for the job. Questions should therefore be open-ended (i.e. avoid a yes/no response) and might address such areas as work ethic, problem solving, people management, communication, self-motivation, ability to multi-task, etc. depending on what the position calls for. You should also try to determine the degree of “fit” between the applicant and the supervisor. Here are some examples:

- For a position with a high volume of contact with the public, you might say: “Tell me about a past job where you were in frequent contact with members of the public. What did you enjoy about it?”
- What were the challenges for you?”
- To determine how well someone works under time pressure you might say, “Tell me about a job where you were under time constraints to get work done. What happened if you didn’t meet the deadlines?”
- To determine how well an individual works as part of a team, you might say, “Describe a past job where your work depended closely upon the work of others. What was enjoyable about that and what was frustrating?”
- To determine motivation you could ask: “What part of your work experience has given you the greatest feeling of satisfaction?” What part has been most frustrating? Why did you leave your job? What would interest you in a similar position?”
- To determine the degree of fit between the applicant and supervisor it is helpful to ask: “What type of supervisor have you found easiest to work with? What type was most difficult? Why?”

Consider job components that might be subject to testing. In addition to traditional tests for clerical jobs, candidates for certain positions may be more accurately assessed by having him or her prepare a short presentation or provide a writing sample.

INTERVIEWING

When it comes to conducting the actual interview, try to help the candidate feel comfortable so that he or she is more likely to share information. For instance, you can begin with a warm introduction and if the candidate freezes on a particular question move on to the next until the person is more relaxed. (Sometimes you can segue back to the original question as part of a later discussion.)

It is important to take notes. It will help you remember and compare candidates accurately later on. Additionally, it provides documentation should your choice of candidate be legally challenged. At the conclusion of the search, make sure those notes are filed in one place.

Good listening skills are essential. It is important to let the applicant speak without being interrupted. Since the purpose is to learn as much information as possible in a finite period of time, never dominate the conversation.

A common mistake occurs when interviewers, while introducing a question or trying to put a candidate at ease, telegraph the answer being sought. For example: "We have had a problem with lateness with other people in this position. Is this a problem for you?" or "We need someone who can be flexible in their hours during winter snowplowing season. Does that work for you?" The applicant is then placed in a position where he or she knows there is only one right answer.

Give the candidate enough information about the job and the opportunity to ask questions. Encourage her or him to call you if a question arises later on. Be direct about level of compensation, when performance reviews are conducted and when raises are considered. Try to make sure you've given the candidate every opportunity to share relevant information with you. A final question could be, "Is there anything else we should know about you?"

MAKING YOUR CHOICE

Compare the candidates and choose the one whom you believe will do the best job. If you do not believe the right person is among your current pool of candidates, do not feel you have to hire anyone yet. Hiring the wrong person can be much more costly than waiting and culling a pool of new candidates. When the first recruitment attempt fails, the second is usually successful.

- Jill Muhr, VLCT Human Resources Administrator

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