

Seven Steps to Hiring the Right Person — for the Long Term

How seeing clearly and digging deeper
increases your chances of finding
the best new team member the first
time around.

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In today's world, managers and their supporting interview teams rarely receive best-practice training for how to hire for optimal results.

In fact, with the exception of legal and EEO topics, organizations often avoid hiring and interview training altogether because it is a complex process that involves many layers of preparation and evaluation. To neatly summarize key points, provide more than just anecdotal best-practice evidence and then reinforce learning through post-training exercises can be difficult and time consuming.

So, instead, most of us learn how to hire by watching others, and thereby adopt less-than-ideal habits and practices.

**One of the worst habits?
Jumping right in before doing your homework.**

Here are seven steps you can take to vastly improve your odds of finding the best holistic fit for your organization, and save time overall:

Step 1 — Understand your broader organizational culture.

Take objective stock of your organization's culture, focusing on these characteristics: communication, collaboration, openness, maturity, innovation, cohesiveness, mission-orientation, values/ethics, diversity and supportiveness. You may want to engage other leadership and HR to help with this evaluation— this is good information for everyone to have and use.

Step 2 — Understand your team dynamic.

Use the same characteristics above to evaluate your own team. What tone have you set? What team personality has developed? This is not an exercise intended to judge or change things, simply to understand. The better you can define your environment, the more success you will have recognizing the candidate who will best fit, adapt to and complement your team.

Step 3 — Clarify your *real* needs.

Spend more time up front defining the role you need filled. Fundamentally, it's very difficult to hire the right person if your core needs are unclear and the job responsibilities are hazy. Resist the temptation to duplicate the same old job description that's been in use forever. Be willing to analytically evaluate the role, its impact and the true gaps that exist on the team or within

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the department. Coupled with the deeper perspective you now have of your organizational and team culture, you can craft your job description to accurately describe the day-to-day functions, challenges, opportunities, environment and skills requirements. This will, in turn, drastically improve your chances of attracting more self-aware applicants who are qualified for and enthusiastic about the position.

Step 4 — Cast a targeted net, not a bigger one.

Bigger isn't always better, and resume volume can be more trouble than it's worth. Since advanced job posting boards and talent acquisition tools come onto the market daily, you're no longer limited to Monster, Hot Jobs and CareerBuilder. Instead, reach your principal audience by using industry-specific and specialty-focused sites — with a little research, you'll find the best "pond" to fish from. Even better, you may be your own best resource.

Those oh-so coveted “passive” job seekers are out there, waiting to hear from you on professional networking sites like LinkedIn and Plaxo. How about your alma mater ... does it have an Alumni job site? You may receive fewer resumes, but they’ll be more targeted and relevant.

Step 5 — Read between the lines.

Once you’ve qualified candidates’ skills, look beyond key words, degrees and school rankings. In many cases, the more telling information is embedded in the resume’s content and structure. Specifically, look at consistency, accuracy and flow of information (or the lack of these things) because they are telltale signs of how the applicant communicates, thinks, prioritizes value and draws conclusions. While being mindful that a resume is simply a piece of paper, if your applicants can’t convince you on paper that they can be clear-thinking, organized and succinct contributors who bring quantifiable successes to the table, they’re probably not the best candidate.

Step 6 — Dive deeper when assessing your candidates.

You probably have three or four questions you ask all candidates during an interview. And, if we’re being honest, you may frequently make up your mind within the first few minutes. The truth is, it’s tough to critically evaluate people without taking the time to get to know them. That’s why advanced techniques, such as “behavioral interviewing” which explores the way a candidate thinks and provides deeper insight into their personality, and personality tests, such as the Myers-Briggs or DISC, can improve the likelihood of success.

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Whether your organization can take advantage of these methods or not, keep in mind these most critical points: 1) incorporate questions that get candidates to talk about how they approach their work, and 2) be consistent by measuring every candidate with the same set of questions.

Step 7 — Value “will” over skill and “substance” over form.

When you’re under pressure, it’s easy to become myopic and hyper-focused on hiring someone with exactly the right skill set so they can “hit the ground running” because you needed this position filled “yesterday.” Yes, you need someone with the core skills to perform the job, but try to use a long view and make exceptions for exceptional people. Skills can be learned, developed and improved. On the other hand, eagerness, desire, will, motivation, adaptability, innate intelligence, commitment...well, people either have these traits or they don’t. And if they don’t, all the skill in the world won’t make them a high-performer. Moreover, the goodwill you create by giving people the chance to prove themselves usually pays off. Similarly, don’t get drawn in by glitz and glitter. If a candidate who has an impressive presence and tosses out all the right buzz words and sound bites can’t back up the spiel with grounded examples, he or she may be accustomed to cruising on charisma and not have the goods to actually deliver.

Clearly, navigating the hiring process successfully is challenging in many ways and on multiple levels, and the results can have significant, exponential impacts – both positive and negative.

If you take the time up front to understand your organization’s culture and needs, look in the right places for candidates and use smart techniques to get to know them, you will vastly improve your chances of hiring the right person the first time around.