

Truth 28

Candidate screening: Let the facts speak for themselves

In a scene from the movie, “Miracle on Ice,” Herb Brooks, future gold-medal winning coach of the U.S. Olympic hockey team, is overseeing the squad’s tryouts when he tells his bosses -- much to their political displeasure, he wants a team with the *25 best* players; not the *best 25 players*.

Mr. Brooks’ points of emphasis are worth considering, as there is a dramatic distinction in his words beyond semantics.

At some point, you will need to attract and select talent -- *the right talent*, from outside your organization. This may sound like a daunting task -- often involving job fairs, recruiting advertisements, multiple job specification reviews, and interviews; however, it need not be.

There is a little known way to help you expedite the process. *Let the candidates “self-select” by offering candid insight that will allow the prospective employee to realistically determine whether or not they want to work for you.*

In this regard, there are 6 key areas of “organizational fit” to discuss and probe.

In the first place, not every workplace is right for everyone. Accordingly, you should give a thorough overview of your company’s culture, explaining its salient attributes and their day-to-day influence.

You should *ask why the candidate is looking for a job* (as well as the reasons for past job changes), trying to determine if he or she is running “from” his or her current organization as opposed to expressing a passionate view as to why they belong in your organization.

Second, you should *discuss your company’s values*, how they are embraced and manifested, and whether they are in alignment with those of the candidate.

In this regard, there are several often-enlightening questions that provide such insight. These include, “How would you define personal fulfillment?” “Tell me about a time at work where you had to bend the rules?” or “Have you ever compromised quality for speed?” Also, watch the detail of how a person interacts with others if you are meeting them outside of the office.

Third, you must *determine if the candidate has relevant and applicable experience*. This is where you describe the position’s near-term challenges, while determining if the candidate is at the appropriate level of professional growth (i.e., early or more mature in their learning, an established practitioner, a functional expert, or an opinion leader) to make the desired impact.

Fourth, you should *inquire about the candidate’s job competencies* using a technique called “behavioral-based” interviewing. This methodology provides insight into “what” an individual accomplished, as well as “how” (i.e., with influence, knowledge, charisma, technical proficiency, leadership, etc.). It is predicated upon past behaviors and attitudes being repeated when confronted with a similar set of problems.

Behavioral-based interviewing is particularly effective if multiple interviewers and there is advanced planning and coordination around who will ask what. Examples of behavioral-based interview questions may be found in Appendix F.

Fifth, *you should look for team players*.

In your quest for “better, faster, and cheaper,” you will place a premium upon individuals with proven employment records comparable to your current challenge in order to aggressively jump-start your organizational initiatives. Sometimes, these most talented of individuals are the least likely to embrace a team approach.

Lastly, and perhaps off most importance, *you should hire people who are better than you.*

David Ogilvy, the advertising genius known for building brands such as Rolls Royce and Hathaway, noted the secrets of success as, “First make a reputation for being a creative genius. Second, surround yourself with partners who are better than you are. Third, leave them to get on with it.”

His second point is worth reflection here. You want people on your team with the highest level of mental ability. Assess the candidate’s expertise, and make it clear that you not only wish to learn, but also he or she must be willing to and is expected to share.

In sum, probing these key areas will help candidates determine their respective levels of comfort and interest about your organization – i.e., self-selecting, while minimizing your probability of making a less than desirable hire.

Truth 29

Avoid the ten potential “placement pitfalls”

You may be tempted to take a few staffing “short cuts” when it comes to external hiring or the re-assignment of incumbents. The problem is that haste will likely cause more troubles in the long run.

In this regard, you must be cognizant of and avoid the following precarious mindsets or practices:

1. You think a Band-Aid will stop the bleeding.

While the short-term needs of any business can be pressing, try not to act in a “quick fix” manner that detracts from the organization’s long-term horizon, particularly if there is a high probability of negative impact to an otherwise healthy workplace climate.

2. You believe everything on the candidate’s resume.

It has been estimated that up to 40% of resumes have everything from little white lies and exaggerations to blatant misrepresentation.

Resumes are not fact sheets; they are “eye candy” with all the right buzzwords. They are designed to do one thing and one thing only -- catch the attention of the hiring manager.

If the paperwork looks too good to be true, it probably is. Bogus degrees, falsified credentials, lapses in employment, and other significant inflations and omissions are becoming more the rule than the exception.

In response, try to obtain as much recent, reliable and valid objective information as possible about the candidate by utilizing effective pre-employment screening and, to the extent possible, “back-door” reference checking procedures. For the latter consideration, always get information from prior supervisors and document your conversations.

3. You believe that every position must be filled with an “A” player or someone with leadership potential.

While it is true that you’ll likely return faster and more often to an automotive service station staffed with more “A” players than its competitor down the road, it’s not an absolute. You also need your share of good corporate soldiers.

4. You put less than your best foot forward.

There is no upside to a lengthy employment negotiation. Act in good faith. Show all candidates and internal placements that they are “wanted” from the onset.

5. You treat everyone the same.

To the contrary, fresh and innovative recruiting practices should be considered to accommodate the needs of today’s workforce. In this regard, offering such benefits as flexible and part-time schedules, and work-from-home allowances may be positively received.

6. You try to fit a square peg into a round hole.

Your best individual contributor does not make the best manager.

7. You fail to keep parties of interest informed.

Reduced ambiguity in the staffing process is something to be diligent about. Accordingly, after the interviews are completed, you (or your designees such as the recruiter or human resources representative) should collect and compile the thoughts from and reactions of each interviewer. This is an ideal time to identify any discrepancies that the candidate may have presented. It also serves as an opportunity to reinforce with all parties the competencies being sought.

8. You are not prepared for the water cooler.

For internal candidates, you should be able to articulate the rationale for the candidate's re-assignment or promotion (i.e., significant changes in or planned for: impact, supervision, scope, responsibilities, interactions, qualifications, problem-solving, etc.). Why this individual versus others? Why now? What are the overall related organizational implications?

For external hires, be prepared for any comparisons to current talent

9. You keep waiting for the "ideal" candidate.

This is a lot like waiting for Godot; it just isn't going to happen. In most cases, there will be some compromises or tradeoffs between your job spec and each candidate's resume. Don't waste time or money "holding out" when you have someone who checks 9 of the 10 boxes.

10. You think that you can change an individual.

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The Truth About Thriving in Change

Truth 25

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Truth 27

Don't surround yourself with yourself

In our personal lives, a look around shows that we generally tend to surround ourselves with people of like interests and perspectives.

This paradigm does not work at a changing workplace.

As the world seemingly shrinks, with markets and products extending their global reach, it is becoming more the rule than the exception for managers to have teams comprised of men and women with a wide range of multi-national educational, ethical, business and life experiences. In fact, many of us work in larger organizations and/or ones that may be contractors or suppliers to the U.S. government that are legally required to be in compliance with affirmative action guidelines that encourage this “mix.”

Unfortunately, some managers confuse the terms “affirmative action” and “workforce diversity,” and while they are conceptually related, they should not be used interchangeably.

Affirmative action is about comparing your workforce to the local population in terms of its representation of various factors such as gender and ethnicity. Its goal is to have your workforce appear as a statistical mirror, and for you to explain and justify where and why it is not. Its primary tool is a calculator.

Diversity is about mutual human understanding, appreciation of differences, and the extension of empathy. It is about inclusion, not exclusion. It is about the way we treat each other and interact. It is based upon respect and dignity, not numbers. It welcomes fresh perspectives, and it encourages and empowers all employees to actively contribute to the overall success of the organization. Its primary tool is an open mind.

While some may view affirmative action as a chore, diversity should be embraced as an organizational imperative. To do so, you must seek out and blend the passions, commitments, and hearts and minds of each of your team members -- cultivating and creating collective inspiration.

This is easier said than done.

Many organizations fail to take diversity seriously as a business challenge – offering merely lip service or a passive day’s training to the topic when it is a real, embedded, and ongoing problem to be managed at all levels. Not only because it is the right thing to do, but also evidence shows that it is a key for competitive advantage.

In the first place, diversity enhances team performance. This was validated in a study that found medical scientists performed especially well when they maintained on-going work relationships with colleagues having a wide assortment of values, experiences and disciplines. In fact, this study found that constant close association with colleagues similar to themselves decreased the performance of these professionals.

Secondly, diversity leads to better problem-solving and decision-making. This was reported in a study when mixed-gender groups consistently produced better quality solutions than did all-male groups. The statistically significant findings included the fact that no all-male group ever scored higher than a mixed-gender group. Similarly, another study noted that ethnically diverse groups were more efficient, over time, in identifying problems and generating possible solutions.

Lastly, diversity is better for your bottom-line. This was concluded in a study conducted by Cedric Herring, Ph.D., Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He found that “racial diversity in a company’s workforce leads to improved business performance.” Specifically, Herring noted that, “businesses with greater diversity reported

higher sales revenues, more customers, larger market shares and greater relative profits compared to firms with a more homogeneous makeup.

We are all travelers on a common organizational and life path. Seek out and welcome diverse perspectives and backgrounds, be cognizant of individual perspectives and grounding, and leverage the strengths and differences of each person so that balance and synergy might be achieved. After all, if the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Lion, and Dorothy – folks with diverse demographics and interests who bonded around common cause and overcame numerous obstacles on the “yellow brick road” could come together as a team, why can’t you?