

How to Pick the Right People for the Right Job

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Do you have any suggestions on how to choose the best candidate for my company's future, without setting myself up for a discrimination case? A key manager has tendered her resignation, giving 6 weeks' notice. She has recommended two people, who she feels have the skills and experience to take over her responsibilities, and I agree with her. One candidate is female and the other male, and as you can imagine, the rumors have already begun to circulate.

This is a tricky area, and I'm sure to get lots of follow up mail, on how to handle this situation. Our owner has requested anonymity, so let's call her Jane Doe. First, let me congratulate Jane for looking internally for a replacement. Then we'll take a look at discrimination. Finally, we'll talk about how to decide on the right person for the job, while keeping in mind 90% of executives find it difficult to attract and retain the best employees.

It's smart to promote from within, because the learning curve is shorter. Established employees can focus on getting to know the job, without having to get to know the company. Promoting from within is a great way to keep good people. Sometimes we forget to encourage internal promotions because, as owners, we feel stuck in our jobs, get busy with other things, don't think we can offer our people enough opportunity, or just don't know

how to approach development conversations. That's no excuse. We need to talk with all our employees, find out what they want to do next, and help them figure out how to get there.

There has been a lot of press on discrimination suits, related to unequal opportunity, pay and management promotions, and unfair treatment. Wal-Mart is in a class-action suit, asserting they systematically discriminated; with statistics showing lower pay, slower entry into management, and fewer senior managers among female employees. It is going to cost Wal-Mart a lot more to settle this suit, than it would have cost them to implement non-discrimination training and hiring practices. Don't get yourself into the same problem.

We all need to address the reality that it just feels more comfortable to work with people who think and act the way we do. The problem with a homogenous workforce is that the company becomes less innovative, challenges itself less, and ends up losing out on opportunities. Diversity is good for the company, even if it makes us personally uncomfortable. An owner's job is to focus on diversity in hiring and promotions, as we work to get the best person in every job.

How do you create diversity? We have to watch our hiring and promotion practices, and be clear with our expectations, and lead

by example. This means no off-color jokes, no hanging out with a select few, and no tolerance for exclusionary behavior by anyone. We need to teach ourselves and our employees how to be comfortable working with people who are different from ourselves.

Why bother? Diversity is good for business. Women and minorities are the two fastest growing buying segments in the U.S. market. If we have employees who think the way our target customers think, we are going to be more inclined to buy, innovate, and assemble the right products and services for those growing segments.

If your company is a government contractor, you are required to practice affirmative action. What does that mean? You have to demonstrate a balanced workforce, or may be required to set and meet goals for hiring to achieve ethnic and gender diversity. If you don't, you may lose out to competitors who are willing to implement a more balanced approach.

Where do you start? Look around your company.

- How many people of color do you see?
- How many of your managers look different from yourself?
- Of your last 5 promotions, how many were people of a different sex, race, or ethnic background from yourself?

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- Think about whom you turn to for advice – are you getting information from people who are different from you?
- How often do you ask someone who makes you uncomfortable to chat, and get to know each other better?
- How often do you take managers and staff out for breakfast/lunch, to get to know them?
- How many times in the last 3 years has your company explored entering a diversity market?
- What do you know about diversity markets – gender or ethnicity based?
- Develop an action plan for the company to follow, to insure all employees are on track to achieve their personal plans, as the company pursues its goals.

Remember, if you don't know how; hire someone to help you through it.

How do you go about making the right selection? Assess your candidates for talent, rather than skills or experience. Evaluate candidates for their ability to respond to goals, outcomes and expectations you set. Decide which candidate is best at building on people's strengths, as opposed to focusing on fixing weaknesses. Which candidate does the best job encouraging others to finding the right fit within your organization? Whether your candidates do these things with peers, subordinates, or bosses, these are the attributes you're looking for. They will contribute to your candidate's success, and likely contribute to longevity of the people they deal with throughout the company.

Looking for a good book? Try, *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*, by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. It comes out of a survey, done by Gallup, of 1 million employees, and contains some great information on what makes a great manager as well as a great company.

If your answers are no, never, rarely, or infrequently, it's time to get moving, and do something different! Start today by looking for your next employee in a diverse setting. Call the local Chamber for help. Talk to local organizations. Advertise in publications that appeal to a diverse workforce. Focus development efforts on employees who can balance your population.

What does Joan do, given that she has to act immediately to promote one person?

- Figure out who is the most qualified for the job.
- Decide if that will meet a diversity requirement.
- Explain to employees how the promotion was made.

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