

## Finding the Right Employees

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I have problems finding the right person to hire. How do I choose from the many applicants and resumes that I get? I don't want to hire the wrong person. Maybe I should just look at people who are personally referred to me?

You're right. Hiring can be challenging. Many times hiring is rushed, faced with an unexpected opening. Maybe you've found yourself in the middle of an interview, wondering why you are talking to someone who doesn't seem at all qualified. Or, you may feel you're settling for someone, even though your gut tells you there could be a problem down the road, just to get the position filled. The challenge is to get the right person, to fill the job and perform as an A player.

Finding the right person is a multiple step process, starting with properly defining your requirements. You want to get in a lot of applicants, using a systematic way to evaluate resumes. Initially screen people over the phone, before you commit to a face-to-face interview. Take notes so you can compare candidates after the fact, and match candidates to the job description. The final steps in the hiring process are reference checks – always do them – followed by negotiating the offer and confirming it in writing, and signing any confidentiality or employment agreements.

Start with job description, including the name of the job to be filled, salary range, location, and to whom the position reports. Be specific about what you are looking for – personality traits as well as job skills and experience. In terms of attitude, decide if you are looking for someone who makes snap decisions, or someone who thinks their way through each decision in a methodical fashion? Steer clear of prohibited criteria such as age, sex or race. Besides being illegal, these criteria may cause you to overlook otherwise qualified candidates who could do a great job for you. Finally, define your job goals and standards, what the candidate has to deliver each day, week, month, to justify continued employment.

Now it's time to look for applicants. Decide on geography – do you want someone who is local, or are you willing to consider candidates who might have to relocate from another area of the country? Does this person have to live close to the office, so that coming in during a snowstorm is no problem? Or, will this person be working remotely, using a laptop, internet and cell phone to connect with you.

Today's world of search enables even the smallest business to cast a wide net, using employment search engines like Monster.com, where you can both post ads and search resumes. If you're in a hurry, turn

to employment agencies, and ask them to help you. They often have a ready pool, and may be able to spread their fees out over a couple of months, to help you stay within budget. Don't forget to post the job internally; let your employees have first shot at the job. Tell everyone you run into that you're looking; word of mouth can be a powerful recruiting tool.

When the resumes roll in, use a systematic process to evaluate them. Use the same process, no matter whether the candidate came from a referral, an ad, or an agency. Define criteria that you are looking for on the resume, including minimum # of years in one job, specific skills, and attributes. Have a highlighter ready to go through each resume, marking off what you're looking for. For example, if you want someone who has experience developing presentations, you might also be looking for the word Powerpoint on the resume. If you want someone who can sell, look for goal orientation on the resume. If you want someone for accounting, look for experience with the accounting system your firm uses, which will cut down on training time.

Once you have qualified resumes, it's time to interview. Start with a 10 minute phone screen of all qualified resumes. With each phone screen, review the facts on the resume, and check that they know how to do what they say they did. If you

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have any concerns, stop the phone screen and move on. Look for people who can stay on point, and avoid people with lengthy stories and excuses. Check for attributes and attitudes by asking questions about personal goals, and by asking candidates to tell you about a project that didn't go well, an accomplishment they were particularly proud of, and their ideal job.

Record notes during each interview, and complete your notes immediately after the interview. After awhile candidates can blend together, and a good set of notes are critical to keeping them straight. Try a scoring system, to rate the quality and applicability of each candidate. Remember, too, that fit to the job is as important as quality of the candidate. You may be talking to someone who is smart, friendly, and you'd love to get to know them better personally – that's different from deciding if that person could do a great job for you in the position you have open at the moment. Look for candidates who can answer your questions in a straight forward manner, and who then ask you questions about the job and the company. You want someone who is truly interested in knowing what they would be doing, and who wants to figure out if this will be the right job for them.

Got candidates you'd like to hire? Check references. Ask for at least 2 business references, people

they have worked for in the past. These are much more important than personal references. Again, put together a few questions, which you ask every time, focusing on performance, reliability, things the candidate did well, and things the candidate could work to improve. Ask if the reference would consider hiring this person again, and why the person is no longer there.

Trust your gut; the answers need to make sense, at every stage. Remember, your goal is to hire someone you can work with for a long time, who can do an outstanding job for you. Take enough time to do it right.

Looking for a good book? Try Behavior Based Interviewing, Selecting the Right Person for The Job, by Terry Fitzwater, or Interviewing and Selecting Higher Performers: Every Manager's Guide to Effective Interviewing Techniques, by Richard Beatty.

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