

Hiring for the First Time

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I need to hire my first employee. What should I look for? If I could duplicate myself, that would be great! There's a lot to do, and I need help.

This is an important hire. It shows that your business is expanding. You get a change to try out support, and find out what works for you. You get to learn the basics about hiring and managing employees in your business. And, you have an opportunity to make your business stronger and more stable, as you start down the path of making your business dependant on you to do everything.

You want to decide where you need the most help, and what kind of person you're looking for. You need an interview process, including a good set of interview questions. Think through what your offer will include. And plan out the new employee's first stage of employment, from coming on board to passing 30, 60, 90, and 6 month reviews.

Let's start with figuring out what you need to hire. Make a list of everything you do during the day. Separate tasks into those you do well, and those you do less well, or find distracting or time consuming. You want to focus on building the business – getting and nurturing customers. Use your daily task list to decide what you should keep doing, and what to delegate.

Review your “tasks to keep and tasks to delegate” list. Add a list of attributes this person will need in order to be succeed. Attributes might include, “take charge”, “accountable”, “self directed”, “focused”, “able to talk with customers”, brings tasks to conclusion”, good at taking notes”, “good at follow through”.

Now think through your interview process. You can save a lot of time and energy by starting with a brief phone interview. Spend 10 minutes on the phone, to be sure candidates are in your ballpark in terms of skills, attributes and costs. If they are, then schedule a face to face interview. Follow that up with a second interview, at the end of which you may make your offer.

Take your time and hire carefully. You'll be investing time and effort to train this person. You want to be sure you have someone who will last. If you're not sure, look at more candidates, and add in a third interview. Whatever you do, don't settle for less than a top notch candidate just because you need someone. Instead, fill a gap with a temporary employee, if you have to have someone, until you find the right person.

There are some specific things you want to do in the interview process. Be sure to ask the person to detail what they did in their past 3 jobs. Ask for specifics. Also ask what the person made in the last job, and

what they're looking to make in the next job. Make sure that what they want is in your ballpark. Also ask for references, at least 2-3 business references, including their boss or bosses' boss from the last 2 jobs. References speak volumes about people, and you want to be sure you have a candidate who commanded the respect and good will of previous employers.

Make a list of questions you want to ask in the interviews. You can ask the person what they liked best about the last job, and what they most wanted to change. Ask about the best, and worst, bosses they've worked for. Ask them to describe an ideal project, and the type of work they prefer not to do. This will help to keep you on point, focused on getting to know the candidate you're interviewing.

Define what you intend to offer this person. Consider salary, bonus, vacation, sick and personal time, health care, disability insurance, and other benefits. Figure out what is your maximum, and don't go beyond that range when negotiating. If you candidate is out of range, keep looking.

Decide how you intend to review this person. Be sure you know what milestones you want this person to accomplish after 30, 60 and 90 days on the job. After 6 months is another good check point, followed by 1 year. Write out a list of expectations, and



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place it in the personnel folder, so you can pull it out and refer to it when review time rolls around.

One last thought. Be careful about trying to replace yourself. You're the entrepreneur. Look for an employee, who can do some of what you do, and free you up to get more business. This is your first hire, not your last. Keep your expectations and wish list within reason.

Looking for a good book? Try *Stop Hiring Failures!* By Steve Springer. Happy hunting!

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