

The process of hiring good workers

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“We’ve been approached by experienced personnel from other firms. Either the firms are going out of business or are downsizing. As a small-business owner, this information is invaluable. Their pain can be our gain. What is the best way to go through an interviewing and hiring process, to be sure we get good personnel on board and avoid the duds?”

Great question! After years of finding it hard to get good personnel at a reasonable cost, the tables have turned. With unemployment through the roof and many companies experiencing difficulty, good employees are forced to consider their options. Buttoning down how you approach and evaluate candidates will help your company avoid costly mistakes and set you up for success coming out of this recession.

Set up and stick with a shopping list and don't get distracted. Establish test protocols. Be clear what attributes make for a good employee in your company. Be ready with an on-boarding process, starting with making an offer. Have a hiring process and stick to it.

It's easy to get distracted when a seemingly good employee comes knocking on the door, even if that potential employee isn't what you need right now. Decide which areas of your business need to beef up with additional personnel or skills. Get clear as to whether you're looking to replace someone, or add to staff. Then stick with those priorities.

If you need sales skill and you come across someone with good operations skill, keep focused on your sales search. Put that operations resume on file. Loading up with talent in the right order increases your chances of keeping costs down and hitting goals.

Write up a job description and salary range for each open search. Look for talent, matched to your price range. Ask candidates to describe what they've done in previous jobs. Compare their description of past experience with the skills you need at your company. Find the closest match you can, within your price range.

It's often helpful to have a testing method to qualify candidates. When you're interviewing complete strangers, it's helpful to gain insight as quickly as possible into who this person really is. Over time, you'll probably find a style or set of attributes that does well in your company.

Tests can help to ensure that candidates have the skills you're looking for. Many people may overstate their qualifications. Or, they may have had work experiences that led them to think they have more skills than they actually do.

You can test skills in the field, on paper, by spending a day together. Your trade organization may have tests to recommend. You can test for functional skills such as administrative, financial and marketing, by turning to experts in those areas. Validate what you think you see, rather than hoping the skills are there only to find out after you hire that the person is less experienced than you hoped.

Keep in mind that every company has its own personality. It's important to understand what kinds of employees succeed most effectively in your company's environment. Is your environment highly technical, thoughtful, free wheeling, disciplined, independent, etc.? Make a list of 10-plus attributes that best describe your company. Look for candidates who use those words themselves or whose behaviors embody those words.

Define the steps your company goes through to bring a person on board. How many interviews does one candidate go through? Who gets involved in each interview? What questions get asked?

Locate several qualified candidates for the position you're trying to fill. Comparison shopping will help you to clarify the best fit. Having candidates to choose from will also give you more courage to negotiate, when that time rolls around.

Have a standard offer letter. Decide who approves and who signs the offer letter. Have a list of documents each candidate/employee fills out and signs. Standardize an employment application, as well as confidentiality and non-compete agreements.

Map out the first few weeks for any new employee. What do they do to meet with human resources, learn about company policies, and get hiring paperwork in order. How does a new employee get introduced around. Have 1, 3, 6, 12-month milestones and someone assigned to check the employee's progress against the milestones. Who mentors the new person for the first few months?

If you make a mistake, correct it quickly by having a frank conversation with the candidate about the need to move on. If you find a great employee, make sure that person feels the same way as you do.

Looking for a good book? Try "Employee Engagement: A Roadmap for Creating Profits, Optimizing Performance, and Increasing Loyalty" by Brad Federman.

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