

## Hiring more critical for entrepreneurs

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**“We've had a couple misfires with people we've hired this past year. What are we missing in the interview process; were we too eager? What can we do to get better?”**

Hiring the right person for the job can be challenging, especially in an entrepreneurial environment. Jobs tend to be broader and less well defined as people are asked to multi-task. People looking for a job may oversell themselves in an effort to get a job. Job needs may change as the company evolves. There may not be a clear, consistent process for qualifying candidates. People in the company may not be experts at interviewing and hiring.

### **Generalists vs. Specialists**

In a transition economy such as we're living in today, people are moving from corporate jobs into entrepreneurial environments. The entrepreneurial work environment is very different from corporate. Not every employee is ready to make the transition.

Things tend to be less well defined in entrepreneurial settings. The job description and organization chart are much more fluid, if they are published at all. People tend to be generalists rather than specialists. There's usually a lot less support in place. There's generally less process, more emphasis on personal accomplishment.

These differences from corporate to entrepreneurial can make a tough work environment for some people. People who rely on structure and who need to have things clearly laid out may have done well in corporate only to find themselves struggling in a small business. Often people coming out of corporate will take support staff for granted, when it may be nonexistent in entrepreneurial environments.

Remember that anyone interviewing has an agenda: to get a job. Many candidates are focused on getting the next job offer, not necessarily on getting the best job possible. The old adage "Any port in a storm will do" is often in play when a potential employee is out of work, or fearful that the current job may soon be gone.

When interviewing, ask candidates to describe what they do in a typical day, week, or month. Ask them how they do it. Ask them which parts they love and which parts they'd rather do without. Listen carefully. Take notes. Look for passion.

Also look for candidates with a history of flexibility and excellence. Look for individuals who have worked in a variety of environments, adjusted well when things changed. Watch for individuals who were repeatedly rewarded for their accomplishments, even as job conditions, managers or goals changed.

### **The Search Process**

Lay out a process for searching and hiring. Set some ground rules. Here are a few that I find helpful. Always have three to four, good-great candidates to choose from. If there's only one good candidate, you may be tempted to negotiate out of desperation. Better to negotiate from a place of confidence, knowing that if one candidate doesn't work out there's more good ones in line.

Make sure to interview the candidate two to three times, including phone and face-to-face. Have more than one opportunity to observe how candidates handle themselves. Encourage candidates to inspect your company and ask critical questions.

Consider hiring an expert to help you search and select. Many entrepreneurs shy away from using search firms, only to struggle with the search process on their own. However, it's important to remember that having a search firm working with you does not guarantee success.

Understand the job you're hiring for by putting a description down on paper. Be honest about the working conditions and job duties. Don't over promise how great things will be. Don't be afraid to scare off a candidate by talking about how tough things might be.

Looking for a good book? Try "Hiring Smart, How to Predict Winners and Losers in the Incredibly Expensive People-Reading Game," by Pierre Mornell.

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