

BY KYLE SALEM

# Choosing Wisely

Searching for top talent?  
Make sure you know exactly  
what you're looking for first

**W**hen it comes to finding new employees in the hospitality industry, there's a pervasive opinion — good people are extraordinarily difficult to find. But once you do find and hire the right person, retaining them becomes even more challenging. It's a notion the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council confirms — during the last census period the sector suffered a 38.2 per cent employee turnover rate compared to 22.5 per cent for the rest of Canada.

#### WHY DO HOTELS STRUGGLE TO IDENTIFY AND KEEP TALENT?

Seasonality and the fact that transient students often appear on the payroll contribute to the problem. However, with the battle for talent tougher than it's been in years, employers must accept some of the responsibility. You need to determine not just who is most likely to succeed, but who will enjoy the job enough to stay and thrive in the long term. Smart hiring decisions lead to reduced turnover, ultimately increasing productivity.

"Hiring winning talent is a complicated process, but one that's much easier when you take the time to understand what you need and who you are interviewing," says Michael Gravelle, managing director of The McQuaig Institute, an Toronto-based organization that teaches companies how to hire successfully.

#### QUICKFACTS

- Canada's average annual employment growth was **1.7 per cent** between 2001 and 2006 — the highest among G7 countries.
- **15 per cent** of Canadians have less than a high school education.
- The Canadian workforce is comprised of **21.2 per cent** foreign-born workers

SOURCE: Statistic Canada's 2006 census on work, education and commuting

“When working with hotel clients who are hiring for anything from front-desk associates to account executives and finance, it’s imperative they understand the successful behaviours needed for the job. But they must also assess each candidate’s behaviour traits to see if they are indeed a match. A résumé and an interview simply do not suffice.”

If you ask a hiring manager what they look for in a candidate, typically they list the required education, previous work experience and other hard skills necessary to do a particular job. They fail to mention the personality traits needed in order to be successful. But in reality, while companies hire based on hard skills, they fire based on soft skills — or a lack thereof.

This is evidenced in a study by The Gallop Organization, which reported that in 2006 only 21 per cent of Canadian employees were engaged in their jobs, implying the other 79 per cent, though capable of doing their jobs, simply choose not to. While companies regularly hire people who are technically capable of doing a job successfully, they don’t consider a candidate’s temperament, atti-

## What Does a Bad Hiring Decision Really Cost?

If you need more incentive to avoid hiring the wrong person, just calculate the cost. According to [staffing.org](http://staffing.org), the hard costs of making just one poor hiring decision account for 14 to 29 per cent of the employee’s annual salary. [Salary.com](http://Salary.com) suggests it’s 33 to 50 per cent. One point they agree on – costs are increasing.

tude and motivations. The result: a mismatch between a new hire’s traits and what the role requires. Then the employee disengages from the job, and ultimately, the relationship fails.

“At Marriott, hiring the right person for a position in revenue management is critical to a hotel being able to drive profitable revenue and show the value of revenue management,” says Chris Holter, regional vice-president, Revenue Strategy, Caribbean and Latin America for Marriott International. “One hotel was very successful because within a month of hiring a revenue management leader, the property was able to find 13 per cent more revenue for the year. In the eyes of the general manager the position paid for itself, which speaks to the value the right person in the right job can provide.”

### PUTTING ASSESSMENTS INTO PRACTICE

Once you determine the personality traits necessary for the role you are seeking to fill, the next step is to screen résumés and assess candidates. You should whittle the list down to eight or 10 people.

At this stage, a simple 15-minute telephone conversation with each person will help weed out at least half the remaining candidates; some won’t have the hard skills required for the job, others will have unrealistic salary expectations and a few will realize the position is not for them. You can be confident the remaining candidates on

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your short list are qualified as far as skills and competency go. But before you begin interviewing, narrow your options even further by considering the most important factor — soft skills.

According to a Michigan State University study on predictors of performance, “Some 90 per cent of hiring decisions are made as the result of the interview, but interviewing is only 14 per cent accurate.” During an interview candidates are naturally on their best behaviour, acting to impress. However, it’s their true behavioural patterns you should focus on. A personality assessment tool used prior to an interview can provide such invaluable information.

Personality assessments offer a window into a candidate’s core temperament, preferred work style and personality traits. Understanding what they offer and how that compares to what is needed for success on the job will go a long way in helping you choose who to hire. Marriott International uses assessment tools to create benchmarks, which help define ideal candidate profiles. Potential candidates are compared against these profiles, which gives the hotel confidence they’re hiring people who fit the roles they are filling.

Of course, it’s still important to do an interview to ensure there’s a rapport between the hiring manager and the candidate, and to confirm the sought-after traits are exhibited the way you need them to be. Continue checking references for

your short-listed candidates, too. Just be sure their core behaviour traits match those needed for the job, since this is the stage most employers frequently omit.

JoAnn Cordary-Bundock, senior vice-president of International Revenue Management for Marriott International, explains how important assessment tools are in the hotel’s overall talent management solution. “We have moved our interview, selection and development process to a whole new level. It’s imperative we select and develop the right talent for this competitive discipline. Assessments are very valuable and integrated in the way we do business today.”

As the hotel industry continues to fight the seemingly never-ending battle to reduce turnover and increase productivity, look no further for the solution than inside your own organization. Take time to identify the behavioural traits needed for success in each job you are filling and understand the traits each candidate brings to the table. If you do, you’ll hang on to the good people and they’ll be far more productive and engaged. ♦

*Kyle Salem is a senior consultant for The McQuaig Institute, an organization that works with many of North America’s biggest hotel companies to improve their hiring process. He can be reached at (800) 387-5455 x367 or ksalem@mcquaig.com.*



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