

Five articles to help you make better hiring decisions



Introduction

We've taken five of our most popular blogs and articles on recruiting and assembled them here to provide you with a quick hit of tips for finding and hiring the right candidates.

Inside you'll learn tips for avoiding common hiring mistakes, identifying critical soft skills every new hire should have, creating a benchmark to measure candidates against and the value of seeking entrepreneurial employees.

Article List

- Five common hiring mistakes and how to avoid them
- Essential soft skills to look for when hiring
- Why employers are starting to look for intrapreneurs
- Determining what type of sales talent your company needs
- What target do you measure your candidates against?



Five common hiring mistakes and how to avoid them

One of the most important decisions a business makes is choosing who it hires. Simply put, selecting the right staff for the job can make all the difference in how well a company performs, and how efficiently a team operates and gets things done. Hiring missteps can lead to major problems; including costly staff turnover and uncooperative teams.

In our nearly 50 years helping organisations improve the quality of hire, we've seen example after example of the same mistakes. Here's a list of some of the more common missteps we've seen.

Trusting your gut

It's hard to avoid the "just feels right" impression you can get while vetting a would-be staffer. But tempting as it is to go with your intuition, you should hire using a range of results-based methods such as assessment tests, work samples and even job simulations. Make sure your hiring process involves a healthy amount of qualitative and quantitative data based on your company's focus areas to avoid this mistake.

Optimistic screening

When hiring, many businesses look for qualities identified in a candidate that match the specific job requirements and company culture. But when you're tuned to target positive features, you can completely miss out on a candidate's problem areas. This can result in a candidate's weaknesses being given short shrift in favour of the (sometimes minimal) positive markers. To counter this, remember that you're looking at a candidate's whole profile and history. Pay attention to anything that suggests they wouldn't succeed at the job.

Uncertain expectations

Many managers don't enter the hiring process with a crystal clear sense of the job specifics - skills, abilities and knowledge - they're looking for in an employee. To remedy this, draw up a clear profile of what you need in a hire before you start screening applicants.

Talking more than the candidate

You're there to decide whether someone has the right stuff for the job, not to sell them on why the job is a good one. Don't spend more than a fraction of the job interview - roughly 20 per cent - talking. Let the applicant do the bulk of the talking in the interview so you have a full read on him or her.

Accepting vague answers

Don't let an applicant get away with giving general or vague answers to your pointed questions. Some people may worry that cutting a candidate off mid-sentence for more detail is rude; not so. You want to gather as much information on their skills and experience as you can to make a confident hiring decision. If they're evading a question, don't let them move on. Instead, follow-up and probe them for as much detail as they can provide. The more of this interview "data" you can collect, the better your hiring will be.

Essential soft skills to look for when hiring

The hiring process is about more than just gauging a candidate's job skills. What they can do, where their strengths lie and their track record are all important, but these hard markers are only one area you should be exploring in the hiring process. There's another area that shouldn't be passed over as you quiz a potential hire: soft skills. Soft skills let you see who a job candidate really is, not just what they can do. Can they do more than just fill the basic requirements for the job?

Here are some pointers to keep in mind to gain an understanding of a candidate's soft skills.

Initiative

Is your candidate a self-starter who takes initiative on their own when a problem arises? Or, instead, do they wait for instructions before tackling the problem? Quiz job candidates for an example of when they spotted a workplace problem on their own and what they did to solve it.

Agility

Few employees fill one single role these days. More commonly, they take on several roles when the situation demands it. As such, new hires should be prepared to wear many hats, and switch between

them at any moment. To spot this ability, pore through their experience and see if they have a track record of being versatile and agile in different job roles.

Follow-through

Is your candidate all talk and no walk? Can they meet the promises they make? Check for follow-through. You can do this by having candidates take skill tests or other duties that must be finished by a deadline you set. Make sure this deadline isn't too loose, but be fair in setting it.

Self-awareness

You want candidates who are critical thinkers, making solid decisions while considering different options along the way. Employees who can do this require a sense of self-awareness about their ingrained biases. Help explore this in the job interview by asking them to walk you through a decision they made that went against their own personal biases.

Company awareness

Does the candidate have a thorough sense of what your company does and what its goals are? Look for this and see if they show genuine passion to work for you.

Applying experience

You want a candidate who can learn from their past experiences and use that knowledge in new situations. One way to bring this out in an interview is to have your candidate solve a hypothetical problem that is outside their past experiences. You want to see if they can use what they know on something new.

Reputation

What your candidate's colleagues say about them goes a long way to understanding how they will perform on the job. Make verifying references a top priority and look at their LinkedIn profile to see how others recommend them.

Why employers are starting to look for intrapreneurs

Established businesses are turning to startup techniques in their attempts to innovate and grow.

This trend was identified at the International Startup Festival, held in Montreal in 2013. Workshops aimed at people looking to launch a startup were attended by many non-startup, traditional corporate employees. The trend was so impressive that the workshop on Lean Analytics, run by Alistair Croll and Ben Yoskovitz, directed part of their talk to intrapreneurs.

Intrapreneurs have been an important part of influential companies since the mid-1980s. Some of the world's most successful tech companies, like Apple, appreciate the necessity of intrapreneurship. As Steve Jobs said in 1985, "the Macintosh team was what is commonly known as intrapreneurship...a group of people going in essence back to the garage, but in a large company."

This back-to-the-garage work ethic is what large companies now want to foster. These companies want to keep their dynamic, innovative workers; finding ways for them to grow within the organisation is the best way to retain their valuable entrepreneurial skills.

Stages of growth for intrapreneurs

Intrapreneurs are not simply trying to change the status quo, or develop a new product. They innovate to revitalise, to engage in competition, to find new customers and increase market share.

The first stage of growth is unique to intrapreneurs: a peremptory phase. They need buy-in from key people within the company.

The other stages of growth are similar to those experienced by entrepreneurs in traditional startups. These are an empathy phase, a stickiness phase, a virality phase, a revenue phase and a scale phase.

Empathy phase

Intrapreneurs have to be analysts. Their empathy stage, where audience needs are assessed, consists of finding problems which already exist in the company.

Stickiness phase

This growth stage consists of identifying and creating a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). This minimum could be restricted by regulatory minimums, and is another area where intrapreneurs face different challenges to startups. Existing companies may have greater regulatory minimums due to their existing investment.

Virality phase

The virality growth stage refers to how the product can grow. This is often challenging for intrapreneurs, who must convince their organisation that their innovation is essential for success.

Revenue phase

Intrapreneurs have more to consider than their startup counterparts. They must prove the fiscal validity of their innovation, but they cannot ignore the existing sales chain in which so much has already been invested. Startups do not have this problem.

Scale phase

The scale phase is where the innovation can grow rapidly. It's another difference intrapreneurs must face. They now often have to hand their project over, sometimes losing all control.

The successful culmination of the growth phases can be incredibly frustrating for intrapreneurs. If the parent company wants to keep its most innovative minds, it must ensure intrapreneurs are well rewarded.

Sources used in researching this article include the TechCrunch article: [The Plight Of The Intrapreneur, Or How to Be An Innovator From Within](#).

Determining what type of sales talent your company needs

According to a 2013 survey by CSO Insights, 47% of salespeople do not achieve quota, ramp up time continues to increase, and the ability to close forecasted business is less than 50%.

In this environment it's not surprising that organisations are constantly on the look out for top sales people. The most obvious measure of a candidate would seem to be their level of success where they are now. So often, though, sales people who may have been stellar performers in one organisation turn out to be under performers in another. That may sound strange, but it's actually pretty logical when you think about it.

From personal experience, part of the issue lies with not having a full understanding of the job requirements, specifically, differences in the "type" of selling required.

Several careers ago, I was a fledgling sales manager in the transportation industry. One of my first hires was a "no-brainer." A recruiter introduced me to a high-performing rep who was working for a competitor. I had heard of her and I knew she handled a number of large, national accounts. I was also aware that her company was going through an acquisition, which explained why she was looking at other opportunities.

After a few interviews we made her an offer she could not refuse. It took a bit of work to sell this internally, as she demanded compensation outside of our range. I finally got approval; she started working for us and guess what?

Not only did she fall well short of expectations, she was un-trainable.

Over the next few months I kept asking myself why she was unsuccessful. I started realising that, even though the job title, industry and customers were the same, there were many aspects of the job that were entirely different.

The behaviours and skills required for selling can vary dramatically based on a number of factors, including the sales cycle, the amount of new business development required and the nature of the product or service.

It's imperative that you conduct some sort of job analysis in advance, especially if the job is a complex one, that provides you with a benchmark against which to measure potential requirements.

As McQuaig customers know, [The Job Survey®](#) will help you identify the key success behaviours for a specific job, which can then be compared to the profiles of specific candidates, helping you increase your ability to make a better hire.

What target do you measure your candidates against?

Zig Ziglar, the famous personal development coach and motivational speaker, posed the question: "how can you expect to hit a target that you don't even have?"

Ziglar was speaking of goal setting and the importance of knowing what your goals are in order to achieve them. And the more specific and detailed our goals are, the better chance we have of hitting them.

Finding your target

The same logic applies in recruiting. Your goal is to find the right candidate. But how do you define and measure "right?" Are you just looking at a basket of skills compared to a hastily cobbled-together job description?

Maybe you've gone the extra mile of considering cultural fit. But how do you measure that? And against what? Will the winner be the person who read the core values on your website and constructed a few star stories with the right words? They certainly deserve points for preparation.

What about how they'll work with others on the team? The manager? Is there a lot of routine to deal with? Or maybe they need to make the rules up as they go. Do they have the nature and temperament to deal with it?

What does your ideal candidate look like? What's the template you can hold a candidate up against?

It's hard to imagine, but there is a way to create a target that can tell you what attributes a person will need to succeed considering all of these aspects. The trick is to look at temperament.

The role of temperament

A person's temperament, or behavioural make up, will tell you how they will perform in situations they will encounter at work. A proper profile will tell you how they will deal with change, or routine; if they are good with people or prefer facts and figures; whether or not they are competitive and ambitious; and so much more.

Using a behavioural assessment tool that profiles candidates will tell you all of this, and there are many useful tools out there to help you do that. But that's just half the equation. You'll know what kind of arrows you have in your quiver, but where is your target? Coming back to Zig, how do you hit what you can't see? Even the best archer (or HR professional) can't accurately hit a target blindfolded.

Removing that blindfold means using the same, scientifically-validated process used to profile a candidate to profile a role. This process creates a behavioural target or benchmark for that role that you can aim for. You may not hit it exactly, but the closer you get, the more confident you can be that your chosen candidate is equipped to succeed.

Add to these two tools a skilled HR professional and you have all you need to hit your target and create a better recruitment process; one that sets the stage for decreased turnover and increased productivity.



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