Hiring Tips to Increase Your Success at Hiring the Best Employees

Many companies rely on hiring practices they have used for years with only minor revisions. These practices are generally adapted from the practices of larger companies or HR organizations. In today's multi-generational environments, influenced by the competition for good talent, it's more critical now to challenge status quo and get creative on finding, attracting, interviewing and on-boarding talent. The key we find most important is alignment – alignment of your needs, culture, goals and budget to those that are looking for what you offer. This seems obvious, but, all too often candidates are successful at getting through the hiring process, only to learn that they are not a good fit. We believe that your success comes from a deliberate hiring process, not one that is pressured to fill a position. Generally, people get hired for what they know (skills) and fired for who they are (character). A poor hiring decision can be very costly in terms of money, time and moral.

The following outlines the process we use when helping clients fill key positions:

Preparation:

This is a critical component to pay attention to. The more prepared you are with knowing exactly what you're looking for and *not* looking for, the easier it will be to filter out the non-qualified candidates. This step includes:

- Knowing and being able to accurately describe your company's culture.
- Being very clear on knowing your core identity and what people can expect working for you.
- Defining the characteristics of ideal candidate, along with desired and required skills.
- Developing a job description (sometimes called a Scorecard) that includes:
    - A positive, yet, truthful description of the business.
    - Why you're looking and what the position offers.
    - 3-5 Key Accountabilities (vs. a bulleted list of duties).
    - In the case of a sales person, territory, markets, travel, etc.
    - Competencies required (and desired) for the position.
    - A compensation range and benefit summary
- Ensuring you have an effective, up-to-date on-boarding process.
- Developing interview questions and protocols.
- Defining the actual results, expectations and measurable outcomes for position.
- Developing a detailed Compensation Plan (we encourage performance-based plans).
- Developing an Acquisition Strategy – how you will attract your candidates.

Recruiting / Advertising:

Once you're prepared for seeking candidates and have defined who will be involved in the screening process, you're ready to start looking. Many companies use recruiters, some recruit on their own, some simply place advertisements, some offer incentives to existing employees, and some use a multi-faceted approach.

If you advertise, you'll likely have reasonable success, however, know that only a fraction of the qualified candidates will actively be looking for a new position. With newer technologies tied into Social Media platforms, it's now possible to get in front of passive candidates – those individuals not actively seeking employment, but, would be interested in a new opportunity. We have had great success getting qualified candidates with advertising alone.

Popular sources for advertising for candidates today are listed below. There are many other job boards, and some are specialized by industry.

- Your own rolodex and contacts (friends, family, vendors, customers).
- Indeed
- LinkedIn

- ZipRecruiter (ties into dozens of job boards)
- Craigslist
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Glassdoor
- Simply Hired

Be creative with this step. Savvy companies include their marketing resources to devise cleaver campaign tactics. A Waste Management company posted ads in health gyms appealing to younger men that wanted to get paid for working out; Google placed a Billboard in their competitors' backyard that simply had a puzzle that led to a recruiting website. Anyone that could figure out the puzzle, was technically qualified for the position and demonstrated ambition for solving problems. Attracting talent really isn't any different than attracting clients.

Screening:

Now is when the fun begins! If you have done your homework well and are using effective ways to attract candidates, you'll be seeing a lot of resumes. The problem with this is how will you know a good candidate from a bad candidate? You'll need an effective way to screen out the non-qualified applicants. Most employers go through all the resumes, set aside those that look promising, contact the individuals for an interview, or a phone-screening, and proceed forward with those that are the most impressive. Unless you've really been thoughtful on your screening process, have great questions that reveal the true qualities of the candidate, your odds of success are at risk. And, you'll likely waste a LOT of time. We've successfully used an on-line application process that allows us to embed custom questions and answers to use for screening. The application software allows us to view only those applicants that selected specific answers to one or more questions. This avoids the pain of looking at all resumes.

The initial screening steps are the most important. Here are some questions that may help you structure your process:

- Is it feasible to have promising applicants respond in writing to some initial questions? Perhaps sending an email to candidates to have them respond to. It's a safe bet not all will answer. And, of those that do, you'll be able to judge their communication skills, and perhaps thinking skills.
- What are your questions uncovering; skills, behaviors, motivators, attitude, etc.?
- How many screening steps should there be? Why?
- Who will be involved in the screening process? Who should be and why?
- Do you have criteria that you and others can use to "score" impressions or responses?
- Will you use Assessments of any type? How about psychological or integrity interviews?
- What criteria will you use to move a candidate through one gate to the next?
- How will you check references? What will you be looking for?
- What will you expect of the candidates (i.e., appearance, professionalism, questioning skills, manners, etc.)?
- What are the best questions you can use to dis-qualify candidates early?
- How long should your interviews be?
- Will / should you use a 3rd party to screen on your behalf to benefit from their objectivity and experience?
- If you use a recruiter, to what extent will they screen the candidates? What are their guarantees?

Again, thorough preparation pays a lot of dividends. If you don't have solid answers to these questions, perhaps you should rethink your process and search for and test new ways to screen candidates.

Interviews:

We follow a multi-step interview process, generally consisting of 8 data points to evaluate each candidate. These include: the candidates' application and resume, 2 phone interviews (a brief initial interview followed, if appropriate with a more detailed interview), 2 in-person interviews separated by assessments (we generally look at Behaviors, Motivators and Competences and will use more thorough testing, or recommend 3rd party interviews, for key positions), reference checks and background checks.

Many applicants will be well prepared for interviews, even to the extent that they are more prepared for the process than the interviewers. There are significant resources available to help individuals prepare for job seeking. It's your job to be more prepared or at least be prepared enough to not let these "professional" job seekers get through your filters. Again, it's all about alignment between what you offer and what they seek.

The quality of your interview questions and your sensitivity to "red flags" are essential to your success. There's an overwhelming list of questions you can get online or from a variety of resources. Be careful with these. While there are many great and useful questions you can find, it's important to choose those that are most relevant to your organization. Each question should have a purpose; questions that provide insight into the individuals character, thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, history, etc. Cute and tricky questions should be avoided as they could send a message that is not congruent to your culture. Also, keep in mind that the answers to "popular" interviewing questions will likely have been rehearsed or memorized by candidates. Questions such as: tell me about a time you had a conflict with a fellow employee? It's likely you'll hear a good response. It's also likely, they don't have a 2nd example. It may be revealing if you asked for one.

If someone is actively seeking a new position, they probably have applied to several job postings. The goal with the initial phone interview is to find out what they candidate is looking for and not to cover what you offer. They probably have not done a thorough job researching your company and may tell you things they seek that you don't offer. It's best to dis-qualify these candidates early and not to press on "hoping" it can work out. You'll also save a lot of time by not conducting subsequent interviews.

During the initial interviews, we suggest considering the following questions:

1. What are your career goals?
2. What are you really good at, professionally?
3. What are you not so good at, or not interested in doing, professionally?
4. What are you looking for in your next position?

Also, when evaluating their history, either during phone interviews or in-person, look for these 5 things for each employer, starting with their first:

1. What were you hired to do, specifically?
2. What accomplishments are you most proud of?
3. What were some low points during that job?
4. Who were the people you worked with? What is the name of your boss? What was it like working with him/her? What will he/she say when we speak with him/her?
5. Why did you leave that job?

While these questions seem simple, they are effective at revealing important aspects of the persons background, interest going forward and will reveal where they have passion. Of course, you'll have many additional questions, but, these are great questions to consider.

The interviews should be designed to reveal inconsistencies or mis-alignment to your organization. If none surface, odds are you've got a great candidate. Look for nuances, behaviors, demeanor, consistency in answers, passion, tact (or lack of), values, anything that offers insight. Have multiple people involved in the process to gain and share their unique perspective and to learn the chemistry between different interviewers and the candidate. Make the candidates comfortable, try to get them to behave as they normally would in a relaxed environment. And, keep in mind, this is as good as they get – they are putting their best foot forward.

Lastly, while it's important to build rapport and make the candidate feel at ease, you must be careful to not become biased by how you feel about the candidate. It's tempting and easy to "really like" this person, but, that can lead to a poor decision. When clients involve us or other 3rd parties, interviews can remain impartial and objective and offer outside perspective.

Assessments:

Getting as much perspective as possible with candidates will simply help you make a more informed, objective decision as to hire an individual or not. Assessments are an effective tool to use to validate or invalidate what your screening and interviewing process reveals. There are a few popular tools (e.g., DISC, MBTI, Strengths Finder, etc.) and they are relatively inexpensive. Our process uses a combination and in provides insight into the behaviors of the individual ("How" they act), motivators, or driving forces ("Why" they act) and competencies (their skills).

For key positions, many companies use a 3rd party to conduct individual assessments in conjunction with aptitude assessments and one-on-one interviews, many times with a licensed Psychologist. This high level of assessment will provide greater and more comprehensive insights, although the fee for these services will be higher than self-administered assessments. Either way, these are valuable tools and should be considered for each new hire.

Some companies use assessments early on to weed out individuals that don't fit a pre-determined profile. While this can prevent wasting time on candidates that don't fit the profile, it may knock out qualified candidates that have attributes that would outweigh or offset a profile concern. In addition, knowing someone's profile in advance may create bias if the person is to be interviewed. Our recommendation is to consider the use of assessments after the initial in-person interview to validate what you experienced in-person and to provide additional information to form additional questions for the next or 2nd in-person interview.

On boarding:

Congratulations! You've hired a new employee. Now, it's important to ensure that you make the most out of the time, effort and expense you've invested to get this far. Your on-boarding is the next important step in the process. Most companies have an informal way of on-boarding. Formal or informal isn't critical in our view, effectiveness is the goal and that generally requires that the process is defined in writing with specific objectives and measurable goals/milestones over the first 90 days (minimum), preferably over the first year.

Essentially, the goals of on-boarding are (1) to minimize the amount of time the new employee takes to get productive and (2) to have them assimilate into your culture effectively. A good outline we learned focuses on 3 primary areas:

"Know" – this refers to knowing important information. Information about the company, the competitors, the products or services, internal and external stakeholders, ideal clients, company's core values and purpose, critical processes, benefits, policies, organizational structure, strategic goals, etc.

"Do" – this refers to actions the employee must be able to do. For a salesperson, this could include: delivering the company's' elevator pitch, doing proposals, conducting demonstrations, writing sales orders, conducting territory analysis, forecasting, group presentations, account analysis, etc.

"Use" – this refers to using tools that are associated with the position. Such as order entry system, CRM program, Intranet site, phone and/or email system, video conferencing, etc.

Think about your specific role and who all the stakeholders are; people that will be dependent on this position. This is a good starting point to identify the things the new employee will need to Know, Do and Use.

In addition, there's administration and orientation tasks to be done early on; getting him/her enrolled in any health or benefit plans, navigating the company facilities, learning other departments and the key people they will need to know or interact with, etc.

Some companies assign a Mentor to the new employee. This has several benefits; the new hire will likely feel safer going to the Mentor for questions, the Mentor will gain experience developing or coaching a new colleague, teamwork will be demonstrated, and the boss or supervisor will spend less time training or covering basics.

A timeline should also be used specifying early objectives on a daily and weekly basis, at 30 days, 60 days, 90 days and ideally for the first year. This will allow you to measure results, adjust if needed and give the new hire clear expectations.

Summary:

Acquiring talent is one of today's top challenges for all businesses. Yesterday's practices are no longer effective, and the cost of a bad hire is painful (studies show this can be as much as 15 times the annual compensation!). If your process allows a less-than-ideal candidate to get on your payroll, you'll certainly find out in time. It's difficult to filter through candidates, so it's vital to have a process and set of resources you can have confidence in to maximize your hiring results. It all starts in preparation, followed by a thorough screening and interviewing process. We encourage a "hire slow, fire fast" policy. And, finally, although this guide did not highlight the Top Grading™ process, it does, however, follow many of the best practices from that process and the principle of hiring "A" players.

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About The Kelsey Group:

The Kelsey Group is a coaching business that offers services to help privately-held businesses achieve the goals of the owner(s). Services are intended to help company's breakthrough barriers and increase the value of the business while at the same time giving the owner(s) more freedom to focus on what's important to them. The Kelsey Group represents The Alternative Board (TAB), offering peer advisory boards and executive coaching, Gazelles International, a Business Coaching organization with proprietary tools based on The Rockefeller Habits, and Target Training International (TTI), a personnel and organizational development company. Contacts are Barry Gleeson (bgleeson@kelsey-group.com | 314-313-8498) and John Keener (jkeener@kelsey-group.com | 314-249-9682).

Book References:

Top Grading - How Leading Companies Win by Hiring, Coaching and Keeping the Best People. Dr. Brad Smart
Higher Right, Higher Profits – The Executives Guide to Building a World-class Sales Force. Lee Salz
The Ideal Team Player - How to Recognize & Cultivate Three Essential Virtues. Patrick Lencioni
Scaling Up – How a Few Companies Make It...and Why the Rest Don't. Verne Harnish