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TOP

Hiring Mistakes

& How to Fix Them !

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The Recruiting Leader in Attracting Top Talent to Your Organization

Top 5 Hiring Mistakes & How to Fix Them

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this person. It has several variations like using a gut instinct about a candidate or locking in on a particular degree or college where a person graduated. Worse yet, when a hiring decision is based on the recommendations of a friend/relative/former employee.

Many managers take personal pride in their ability to use their gut intuition and there are reports that suggest that somewhere between 70-80% of managers will say they use gut instinct to select candidates. There are three considerations to this practice: 1, Its not a defensible process in EOE court and 2, candidates aren't always who they project who they are on paper and in an interview process and 3, Upwards of 66% of job applicants fudging their resumes and background. How many times has it been said, "*this isn't the person I hired!*"

To examine the root causes of this phenomenon, first we need to know that as humans, we learn to rely on our instincts. Now some people have great instincts but they are almost always not burdened with reminders of their failures. They have blinders on and selective memories. This is because the mind has a wonderful ability to forget the failures and promote the successes. In many ways this is a survival instinct and quite useful, however with hiring decisions it is not something that serves people well. It is like the girlfriend/boyfriend that all your friends and relatives hate. You tell them that they don't understand and in time they will come to know this person as you do, when in truth your friends and relatives, who have know you a long time, are almost always right.

The solution to this problem is to design a process that includes a section on how your make your selection *A great hire has both fit and competency.* There are a number of [methodologies](#) that can be employed to handle this problem but each has a set of common elements that serve as best practices. The process should be fair in that each candidate should be exposed to the same process. The results should be written and documented. Whether it is one person or a committee, there should be grades or notes from a meeting documenting each interviewers opinions and input. The process results in a final report with a hire recommendation for the candidate selected.

Mistake Number 4 – No Formal Interview and Decision Process. This mistake has its roots in practicality and expedience. Often in smaller companies there is no formal process because it takes time and resources away from other productive activities. Corners are cut for many reasons but chief among them is that if there is a formal process then it probably creates paper and extra work for people who are already busy!

Now the solution is to design a very simple interview and decision process. Then as your company grows, add layers to the process to make it more robust and effective. For instance at [Staffing and Recruiting Essentials](#), there are some good starting points for an interview and a selection process that includes options for how to conduct and interview, how to create a selection and the decision process to make that selection. It can be a simple as assigning a

3-person team that interviews each of the candidates and compares notes. The operative word here is *notes*. (That's a free piece of consulting here, there should be formal notes when multiple candidates are interviewed to remind the interviewer which candidate said what!) The point here is to avoid this mistake, design a process and use it. Add and improve it as your company grows and needs more talented individuals to grow.

Mistake Number 3 – No Background or Reference Checks. This misstep often occurs because there is no perceived value. Sometimes there is a lack of understanding about how to get valuable information from a background or reference check. The root cause of this may stem from employee protections as they relate to background and reference checks.

Background checking is protected under the Fair Credit and Reporting Act. If an employer learns something negative and makes the hiring decision based on that negative fact or facts technically there's an obligation to notify that employee that you received negative information about them so they can dispute it and correct it if in fact it is disputable (much like when applying for a loan when a consumer's a credit report that has errors). There are a number of protections for employees and candidates. However, it is not impossible to learn quite a bit about candidates and make appropriate hiring decisions.

There are third party background check companies to outsource the task to, the Internet can be researched for information, etc.. Employers must be careful to have written hiring guidelines about what is and isn't acceptable hiring criteria and to ensure that the information they receive about an applicant is fair and accurate. A negative comment about your candidate on twitter may no be truly credible, but a reference check with candidate provided resources or with former employers listed on their application has validity." ***Always get a candidate release form authorizing you to check references!***

The problem with skipping this step is that an employer can be held liable for not knowing what they should know as well as for knowing what they should not know. Confused yet? So where's the middle ground? The answer is, you should your due diligence, because it is in your best interest.

It is true that background checks and reference checks are tiresome and often do not produce much but there is piece of mind that you have dotted all the I's and crossed all your T's. In addition, it has been our experience that about 20% of the time, you will find something you did not expect, positive or negative. Either way it is better to know up front.

If all else fails, there are places that you can outsource these functions. Background checks are no longer expensive. For less than \$100 you can get a pretty extensive background on anybody. There are also companies that will do reference checks for you as well.

Mistake Number 2 – No Clarifying Objectives. This mistake is easily the most difficult to overcome and it is also one of the most important parts of any hiring effort. Think of the clarifying objective of a position as the end point of the journey to fill a position. It is far more than a job description; it includes success factors, written performance standards and timely objectives for the position. This encapsulates the expected performance of any individual who holds the position.

These objectives are developed as part of a proper [job analysis](#). When these objectives are clear, the whole search and interview process can be focused on finding the candidate who best understands and can meet these objectives.

The reason this is not often done is that people think a job description or replication of the previous jobholder is sufficient to fill a position. The problem with this model is that without a clear exact picture of a job, there can be holes. A job description is merely a legalistic document that describes the functions of a job. To make a good hire, it is important that you understand if a candidate understands not only the functions but also how they will be measured and what is considered success.

Still not sure, here's an example. A file clerk must know how to file papers using whatever filing convention is being used, possibly lift boxes, and be able to organize. There is no definition of success. A successful candidate will have few if any errors, be able to keep up with the demands of filing and pulling files and be able to leave for a couple of days without interruption of normal operation because of misfiling or lost files. This is an over simplified example but it holds true.

If you were interviewing for this position, without defining the success factors, you might quiz someone on what filing systems they knew and if they could perform repeatedly lift heavy objects. If you had the success factors you might inquire as to how much time was spent looking for lost files or how many files in a day they were used to handling etc. The success factors become the clarifying objectives of the interview process.

Mistake Number 1 – Lack of Good Interview Technique – This might be the biggest and most agreed upon mistake for the hiring process. Interview technique is not something often taught as part of a job or in a classroom. It is something everyone develops on their own. A great manager is not necessarily a great interviewer. A lot goes into an interview and often times the people doing the interviewing rely on their own gut instinct (See Mistake 5) to determine which candidate is best.

There is more than interviewing than asking questions and knowing which questions are [legal](#) and [illegal](#). That kind of information can be found on the [Internet](#). You can even find information about different types of interviews like behavioral and panel type interviews. So how do you know the difference between a good answer and a great answer? Do you take



notes and ask each candidate the same set of questions? What is the definition of a good candidate question? After all a good candidate should have questions about the company if they did their homework and are truly interested in the position. What are the indicators that someone is being deceptive vs. someone who is just a little nervous? Nervous interviewees may still be great performers whereas deceptive, cool headed candidates may be harder to disqualify. There are many techniques to overcome these situations such as putting the candidate at ease asking the same question a different way or giving the candidate a follow up task to see how well they perform post-interview.

You can see there is more to this than asking a bunch of questions and seeing how the candidate and the interviewer get along. Additionally a poorly trained interviewer can turn off a candidate as well. Remember when you are trying to attract top talent; it is the interview where your company makes the first big impression on the candidate.

Now some people are naturally good at interviewing people but this is the exception. Most people could use pointers and training to improve their interviewing skills. This will yield more objective, on-target and more quality result.

By taking note of these 5 mistakes and working to minimize their impact on your hiring process you can significantly improve the quality of your hires. Soon you will be hiring more A candidates, your business will grow, turnover will be reduced, you will make more money and ...well you get the point. You and your company will be a better organization and your employees will be the best of the best.

About the authors; Tom & Michele Tassinari are co-owners of Synergy Executive Search. They are both accredited search consultants and have been leaders in the recruiting industry. They have broad business backgrounds ranging from Engineering, Biotech and Aerospace, Financial Services Technology and Insurance. Combined they work with a diverse spectrum of clients to solve problems related to hiring practices. Over the years they have developed methods and strategies that can be taught to clients who want to hire better talent. Additionally they are hired as recruiters by companies to find and attract top talent. Either way, they are dedicated to helping companies attract and hire top talent.

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