



TOP TEN MISTAKES
EMPLOYERS MAKE
IN THE
RECRUITING AND
HIRING PROCESS

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We have been through literally thousands of hiring processes. We are often asked about the biggest and most frequent mistakes hiring authorities make in the recruiting, interviewing and hiring process. Here they are:

- 1. Not having a clear idea of what they are looking for . . . that everyone understands.** Hiring authorities often aren't specific enough about the duties, skills and competencies they need. They confuse amount of experience with competency..."8 to 10 years of experience." Does that mean someone with six years of experience can't do the job? Or what about the candidate that has had one year of experience ten times. Putting any kind of numbers of years of experience limits them. What is important?

Employers would be better off defining the functions they want done very specifically, and then finding someone who *can* do it. This may mean someone who has done it well before or someone who has the *potential* to do it well. The specifics need to be written by the hiring authority that has the "pain," i.e. the person who needs the help and is going to be responsible for the new employee.

Concocting "wish lists" of superhuman attributes and unrealistically low pay scales relative to expectations of the experience needed will create havoc in a talent search. Hazy, ambiguous descriptions along with generalities like "good written and oral communication skills" don't help either. Know your target.



- 2. Having an unrealistic idea of what kind of candidates might be available and the money it may take to hire them.** Just because everyone would like to hire Superman or Wonder Woman doesn't mean they are available or will go to work at your company. There is no perfect candidate and waiting for one is as unrealistic as searching for one.

The only way to become realistic about what the market might bear is to interview enough candidates to know what is available and the commensurate earnings expected. It may take quite a number of interviews. The number of quality candidates is drastically lower than it was a few years ago. Our clients are often shocked that the salaries they are locked into won't allow them to hire the quality or experience they wish for.

And just because you believe that your company is wonderful, doesn't mean: (1) everyone wants to go to work there, (2) they will accept any amount you offer, and (3) there aren't four or five other firms like yours trying to hire the same candidates.

- 3. Too many people involved in the interviewing process . . . and the wrong ones.** More than a few studies have shown that hiring is just as successful when *one* person, the one with the "pain," (i.e. the direct manager) is the only person involved in the hiring process as opposed to more than one. In fact, other studies have shown that once the number of people in the interviewing and hiring process exceeds three, the probability of a *bad*



hire is greater. The reason so many people are usually involved in the interviewing and hiring process is that people, naturally, want to spread the risk. So, if it turns out too be a poor hire, people can justify their decision with, “Well, you interviewed him too!” Few people have the courage to interview and hire *alone* and take the responsibility one way or the other, even though better hiring decisions would probably be made.

. . . **and the wrong ones.** Relying on people to screen, interview or have a say in the hiring process who have no personal, working benefit from the potential new hire’s performance (i.e. their position is in jeopardy if a poor hire is made) is a big mistake. Most managers will claim that hiring good people is the second or third most important function they have, right behind making a profit. If this is so, we can never figure out why hiring authorities will delegate screening or interviewing of candidates to other people who may be wonderful people but have no direct experience, knowledge, or “skin” in the position to be filled. “But I don’t have time to look at resumes and interview all those people,” is what we hear. Well, if hiring is one of a manager’s most important functions, he or she *should* take the time and effort to do the whole job from start to finish. How can they afford not to?

4. **Process takes too long.** The average manager thinks that it takes about 30 days to fill a vacant position. Try the truth . . . between 90 and 120! Why? Because folks



drag things out that should be simple . . . not easy, but simple. When the hiring process takes too long, good candidates are lost to more decisive companies, managers look inept at hiring and it gets harder and harder to fill the vacancy. Managers, again, often don't give hiring the high-priority status that is needed . . . shown by action, not lip service. Time kills! The "shelf life" of quality candidates is shorter and shorter.

5. **Poor interviewing techniques.** If hiring authorities would simply write out a simple (. . . or complicated) list of questions and ask *every* candidate the same questions, record the answers and compare each candidate's responses in a timely manner, hiring decisions would be easy to make.

"Tell me about yourself," is the first question down the wrong road. Most employers start with that, ask random questions to "get to know the candidate," make notes on the resumes and then, three weeks later try to compare the candidates. They often spend hours with candidates and don't remember the differences between them.

A structured, disciplined interview technique that is applied to every candidate in exactly the same manner is the only real way to compare candidates. It is so simple and yet so seldom practiced. (We have samples of structured interviews for the asking.)

6. **Interviewing or not interviewing a candidate based on the *resume!*** 40% of hiring a person is based on



personality and chemistry! Then why do people rely on resumes instead of interviews? Because they don't know how to use a resume.

I can't tell you how many phenomenal candidates get eliminated because of a resume and how many poor performers get interviewed because of a well written resume. "But I can't interview every resume I get!" OK, right. But if a candidate even looks like a *possibility* of being a good one, at least pick up the phone and spend 15 or 20 minutes with him or her. Or, better yet, spend 30 minutes face to face with them. Get a quick take on who they are and what they can do. Do this with a number of candidates. You can then thoroughly interview the ones that are the best for your situation. This method is quick and efficient, but it takes discipline . . . no more than 30 minutes on the first one!

Hiring authorities and screeners put way too much emphasis on what is on a resume. They try to judge the total quality of a candidate by a resume. A resume is a "go by." It should simply define a candidate as a "*possibility*" . . . and a broad possibility at that. The interviews have to be the qualifiers.

People who "qualify" a candidate and decide how he or she is going to perform should read Tony Romo's resume . . . a nobody . . . or Kurt Warner . . . a bagger at a grocery store . . . or Abe Lincoln . . . many failures. *Don't rely on resumes!*



7. **Not interviewing enough candidates . . . or interviewing way too many.** Most hiring managers err on the “too few” end of the spectrum. “I want to talk to the three best candidates!” . . . “I don’t have time to talk to everybody!” No one person other than a hiring authority can tell who is “best.” Three or four is usually too few. The “bell curve” for most professional hires is about nine or ten candidates. This, of course, depends on the level of job and the availability of certain types of candidates. The key is to know what kind of availability there is in the marketplace for the kind of person being sought. Our banking division, for instance, may be lucky to find three or four qualified V.P.’s at any one time. A midlevel sales position may require ten or twelve candidates. Even recruiting a number of quality candidates for administrative positions that traditionally would yield many quality candidates isn’t as easy to do in this market.

The key is to interview a range of quality candidates and know what is available. If you want to wait for superman or superwoman, we guess that’s OK. It just depends on how badly you need to hire someone. Just be sure you know, first hand, the quality of candidates who are on the market, and the only way to do that is by personally interviewing the necessary number of available candidates.

The other end of the spectrum is the hiring authority who wants to interview forever, thinking unrealistically that the quality of candidates will get better as more are interviewed and more time passes. All too often, we hear



from hiring authorities, “We have interviewed 20, 25 or 30 candidates.” There is something wrong here. They exhaust themselves in a “process,” forgetting the result . . . and then complain about it. It doesn’t yield a good employee. They confuse activity with productivity.

Interview the number of candidates necessary. Don’t make the mistake on either end of the spectrum.

- 8. Not communicating with candidates after interviews and not giving honest feedback.** For some reason, certain hiring authorities don’t mind being rude . . . even to candidates they are interested in hiring. Everyone is busy. The truth is, to a candidate looking for a job, whether presently employed or not, finding a job is the very highest priority. To a currently-employed interviewer, in spite of the lip service paid to the importance of hiring, it is simply one of their functions. Hiring is a risk. Most employers don’t really like doing it. So the process often gets postponed, sloppy and rather unprofessional.

As the market tightens, quality candidates will have many suitors. A good candidate will simply lose interest in a possibly good opportunity if they are treated rudely. We have had many candidates elect to pursue specific opportunities simply because they were treated with respect and courtesy.

Also, if the candidate isn’t going to be considered, he or she should be told as soon as possible. We are amazed at how frequently a candidate can’t get their call (or calls)



returned . . . just to find out if the company has found a more suitable candidate. We never know when a lack of courtesy will come back to haunt us. Years ago, I had a candidate who was rudely ignored by a hiring authority. A few years later, the roles were reversed. The ignored candidate was now the hiring authority and when I tried to get him to see my candidate (the hiring authority who had once ignored him), my client laughed and said “no” with a vengeful glee. He remembered how he had been treated. What goes around often comes around.

9. **Not selling the job and the company.** Although this isn’t the biggest mistake hiring authorities make, it is certainly the most prevalent one. We can never figure out why, in trying to find the *best* talent available, some hiring authorities act as though they are doing someone a favor by granting them the privilege of an interview. They act as if they have the only job on the planet and candidates are begging to work there. Wrong! Good candidates will have many choices. The days of the early 2000’s, when there were endless numbers of candidates, are gone. The company and the hiring authorities that sell their job the most effectively will hire the best talent. It is a candidate driven market. We can also forget lowball offers, poor benefits or a “take it or leave it” attitude when making an offer.
10. **Not having “back up” candidates.** This means continuing to interview even though a great candidate may have been found. In fact, we recommend having *three* great candidates in the queue.



As happens too often, a hiring authority zeroes in on one candidate, and as the interviewing process drags on (see #4) the hiring authority quits interviewing because it is a pain. They get to the end of the process, make an offer and it isn't accepted. The frustration of having to start all over again is astounding. So, the solution is to keep interviewing until someone is hired . . . and has started the job. We simply expect that a good candidate is going to get multiple offers.

- 10 (a) Not firing a new hire when the hiring is obviously a mistake.** This is a tough mistake to make. Everyone wants to see a new employee to make it. But too often, cutting the new hire too much slack because they are new is a mistake. The numbers of failed new hires we have seen that were let go or quit six or seven months after their hiring, with the hiring authority complaining, "I saw it in the first week!" would make us all cry. It becomes disruptive to the business, it destroys the chemistry of the employees working with the new hire, and worst of all, everyone can detect it, but the hiring authority chooses to overlook it. Respect for the hiring authority diminishes and eventually the new employee leaves or is fired.

The solution adopted by the best hiring authorities is to keep new employees in line in the very beginning, even "over manage" a bit. If disregard for company policies or poor work habits (like showing up late, missing work, or having numerous "personal" problems) emerge in the first few



weeks of employment, it isn't going to get any better. Besides, the "honeymoon" isn't even over.

There is a big difference between "rookie" mistakes and poor work habits, low integrity, bad manners or serious personal problems that impinge on work. Even the most rigorous interviewing process and extensive reference, background and credit checking can't prevent this from happening.

One of the most successful hiring authorities we worked with years ago had a great philosophy. He was the most successful general manager of a nationwide insurance company. And he achieved that for 15 years in a row. He managed 110 people, directly and indirectly. He told me one time that he wasn't successful because he hired better people than the other GM's around the country. The difference was that he fired people "when he first got the inkling." He simply didn't waste his time on people he knew weren't going to make it.

The sense of when to fire a new employee is personal. Good managers know when to do it. Hire carefully but fire quickly! If a bad hire is made, eliminate them quickly. The hiring authority will look like a true manager and everyone is better off.