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SOUND PRACTICES LIMIT HIRING PAIN

Employment A job candidate's technical expertise is not the only pointer to their suitability, writes Karen Gately.

Reflect for a moment on when you have made hiring mistakes. What were the consequences of bringing the wrong person or people into your team? If you get hiring decisions wrong, your job is made significantly harder as you fix challenges created by poor behaviours or bridge gaps because of inadequate capability.

One of the biggest and most common mistakes leaders make is appointing the most technically qualified person and not placing enough priority on the candidate's character.

It is common for leaders to ignore concerns about the attitudes and behaviours a candidate is likely to bring. If your gut instinct is that the candidate isn't right for your team, don't hire them without digging deeper. Explore their fit further through interviews, assessment tasks or reference checks, and be willing to walk away if what you find validates your intuition.

Hiring the right person starts with a commitment to selecting candidates who are clearly aligned with your organisation's values. Be disciplined and patient as you search for the right person.

Here are six tips to help you get the hiring process right.

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1. Ask the right questions

Ask a candidate to describe a time they have won the confidence of an unhappy customer. This can be far more revealing than simply asking them to describe how they deal with customer complaints.

Ask the candidate to describe when they have been able to improve a difficult relationship or find ways to work more effectively with challenging colleagues. This is more revealing than simply asking what makes for a strong relationship at work.

Always ask why the candidate has applied for the role. Exploring their motivations will help you assess the extent to which the job is likely to keep them engaged.

Asking about their proudest achievement in their career or in their last role can help you assess the extent to which the candidate is driven to succeed. Self-motivated people are likely to know how they have contributed and feel a sense of pride in their impact.

2. Use collective wisdom

If you are hiring during this COVID-19 crisis, it is likely your biggest obstacle is accurately assessing candidates whom you cannot meet in person. Reduce the chances of getting the decision wrong by using a panel of people to assess the candidate. Most importantly, don't ignore what your intuition tells you about candidates. While gut instinct can sometimes be wrong, trust in your ability to pick up on signals of misalignment, even over video conferencing or the phone.

3. Assess career aspirations

Alignment between career aspirations and the opportunities your organisation can offer should be an important part of your hiring process. All too often candidates accept roles with a view to moving into the job they really want as soon as they can. While it's great to have people who want to get ahead, if they don't have the interest or patience to do the



Using a panel of people to assess candidates can help when conducting interviews online.

role you need doing, you will probably struggle to get the best from them.

Ask questions such as: How does this role fit into your longer term career aspirations? What does the ideal role beyond this one look like? What are you most passionate about achieving next in your career?

Second, find out if their next-step career aspirations are aligned to what your organisation needs. For example, if you are hiring for a customer service role but prefer someone who can grow into a team leader role within two years, you need to know they want to achieve that outcome broadly within the same time frame.

4. Look beyond the interview

Include a variety of steps in your recruitment process to test your perceptions of the candidate's character, competence and career aspirations from multiple angles. While interviews are an essential part of your process, personality profiling, skills testing and reference checking can add value if used well.

There is usually value in doing abilities tests such as conceptual or abstract reasoning, literacy tests or other measures of cognitive capability, and undertaking personality profiling to assess relevant character traits. Remember that tests need to be considered in the context of broader evidence of past performance.

5. Reverse reference checks

Reference checks are often the final step in the hiring process. There are so many problems with this approach it's hardly worth doing. If a referee provides information that raises concern at this late stage, you have no way of exploring it further. Ideally, at least one reference check should be completed once the final two or three candidates have been identified. Feedback on each candidate can then be explored through the interview or assessment tasks. A second reference check should be done before your final decision.

One of the most important questions for referees is: "Would you hire them again and why?" If the referee says yes but the candidate would need to have improved a particular skill or approach, you can be assured that has had a significant impact on their ability to be successful in that role.

6. Be diligent about probation

You need to set clear expectations and engage in regular coaching conversations. If your new team member is being managed remotely, it is critical to interact with them regularly and take steps to assess how they are performing. Seek feedback from others who can help you make accurate judgment calls about the suitability of their character and competence. **AFR**

Karen Gately is the founder of Corporate Dojo and the author of The People Manager's Toolkit: A practical guide to getting the best from people (Wiley) and The Corporate Dojo: Driving extraordinary results through spirited people.

WAGE SLAVE

Shut your mouth – tape will help – and get more carbon dioxide into your life, writes Angus Grigg.



If this pandemic is all about becoming better versions of ourselves, then there's nothing more wholesome than a family trip to the country and your nine-year-old with a shotgun.

While others were baking sourdough and doing jigsaw puzzles during the recent school holidays, I was learning that a 12-gauge – that's a type of shotgun for those who don't vote for the Nationals – can indeed be handled by a child yet to reach double figures.

I tried to protest that she was a little young, but my friend Sam, who'd only had a couple of beers, insisted all would be fine. "What's the worst thing that can happen?" he said.

That seemed like a reasonable argument coming from a man with a gun, so I retreated to the fire as my daughter took aim at a clay pigeon.

While telling myself the NRA is not all bad, I exhaled deeply through my mouth before remembering a conversation I'd had the evening before that could lower anxiety levels and perhaps even help us Wage

It's perfect for enduring Zoom calls with an underling who clearly has a nicer house.

Slaves to be more productive.

While standing around another fire – country people love burning stuff – I was told to concentrate on breathing mostly through my nose.

Not only this, I needed more carbon dioxide in my life. Fearing Sky After Dark had joined us around the bonfire, my worries were exacerbated when Jane said I should also consider taping my mouth shut.

The very idea I may have to stop talking, and therefore not express an expert opinion on all subjects, certainly got my attention.

It turns out my physio friend was less concerned about my chat – which was excellent – and more focused on making the point that we have been breathing all wrong. She said we should mainly be breathing through our nose to aid sleep, lower blood pressure and eventually make us better at our jobs.

This did come as a surprise, but it must be true because some guy – a journalist no less – just wrote a book about it. James Nestor crafted *The New York Times* best-selling *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* from this unlikely topic. He even did research on

himself to test the scientific basis for this practice, which has become almost as popular as a plant-based diet in Sydney's Surry Hills.

The basic thrust is that our mouth should be only a back-up when it comes to breathing and that our nose should be doing all the work.

Apparently this was the case a few hundred years back when we ate food that required real chewing. But about the time we stopped letting kids shoot guns we turned to processed food, which did not give our jaws the workout required.

This has resulted in smaller mouths and nasal passages, hence the difficulty breathing through our nose. It also gave us crooked teeth.

Now for the part Andrew Bolt and his carbon-dioxide-loving climate warriors are going to like. According to Nestor, breathing through our nose allows us to absorb more carbon dioxide into our bloodstream, which is vital for splitting oxygen off from red blood cells.

Given absorbing more oxygen is our goal, this is actually a good thing, although disappointingly for Bolt, there is no mention in the book about the broader benefits of carbon dioxide beyond the effect on our nasal passages.

To achieve this nasal breathing renaissance, Nestor suggests applying a piece of tape the size of a postage stamp over your mouth while sleeping. That should cut down on snoring and force your nose to take control of your breathing.

"This is the way your body wants to take in air," Nestor told NPR. "It lowers the burden of the heart if we breathe properly and if we really engage the diaphragm."

In the world of self-help, nose breathing has become the new mindfulness and the shelves are filling up with other titles, such as *Breathing for Warriors* and *The Oxygen Advantage*.

Who knew breathing could become so fashionable?

That said, I give it only two years before we're told to breathe entirely through our mouths again. But in the meantime, get busy driving CO₂ into your body.

It's supposed to lower stress and anxiety and so is perfect for enduring Zoom calls with an underling who clearly has a nicer house or the office literary critic who uses the complete works of Geoffrey Chaucer – all seven volumes – as their video-conferencing backdrop.

And the other benefit of all this perfect breathing is a lower heart rate, which everyone knows is important when lining up a clay pigeon with a 12 gauge. **AFR**



The right orifice: breathing through the nose, instead of the mouth, is the latest rage in self-improvement. Expect mouth-breathing to make a comeback in a few years' time.

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