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How to get the hiring process right

Employing the wrong person can make a leader's job harder and affect a team's productivity. Here are seven tips to ensure you make the right choice.

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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 due to 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.



The job interview is only part of the hiring process.

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. If a candidate's thinking and approach have a detrimental effect on the spirit, engagement or performance of the rest of your team, hiring them comes at a big cost. Be disciplined and patient as you search for the right person who brings the character traits that will enable them and your team to thrive.

Deciding to keep searching can be difficult when your team is under great pressure and you're desperate to fill a vacant role. The current environment, where candidates are being assessed via technology, has made getting culture alignment right even more difficult.

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

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 of their attitudes and skills 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 beyond an initial honeymoon period.

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.

Don't bother asking candidates about their weaknesses. Most will give a "safe" response or tell you what they think you want to hear. Instead ask "What do you want to learn or master next in your career?" Most people will be more inclined to give a truthful and more insightful answer to how they still need to learn and grow.

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 a candidate's 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 role you need doing, you will probably struggle to get the best from them.

Find out if the role on offer fits with what the candidate is motivated to do now and for a desirable period of time. 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.

Be mindful that not everyone has a map of their future clearly laid out, and the absence of one does not necessarily make them a poor fit for the job. Look for a desire to do a good job, use the skills and experience they have and keep learning.

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. It is important to remember tests reveal potential areas of strength and weaknesses and need to be considered in the context of broader evidence of past performance.

5. Reverse the reference check process

Reference checks are often completed as 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 and without further steps in your process, you have no way of exploring it further.

Ideally, at least one reference check should be completed by hiring managers or HR team members 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 your most important questions for referees is: "Would you hire them again and why?" Listen to what is said and what isn't. 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.

Another question to ask is: "We all have strengths that, when overdone, can become weaknesses. What would you say theirs are?" You are looking for insight to when the candidate isn't at their best and what the potential effects of that may be. For example, determined people can be abrupt when they see what they think are unnecessary roadblocks in their way.

6. Be diligent about probation

To accurately and fairly assess character and competence through the probationary period, 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.

Managing probation requires a hands-on approach to coaching and providing performance feedback. Your ability to accurately assess future potential depends on how well you have given the individual the support they need and engaged in honest coaching conversations about what they might need to do differently.

After six weeks you should be able to determine whether the team is culturally aligned. After 12 weeks, aim to be in a strong position to assess culture fit and competence.

7. Fail fast

If you have made the wrong decision, act quickly. Be fair and compassionate but willing to make the tough decision to start again.

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