

How to Hire the Very Best

Everyone we know who is seriously trying to grow their company is handicapped by the shortage of good people, which can be even worse during these rough economic times. Yet hiring skills are often the weakest among line managers and CEOs who actually perform the critical interviews that lead to hiring decisions. Often there is not even sufficient effort spent to quantify what kind of work is really being done, what skills are needed to succeed, and how to attract the best people. In this last area, it seems that CEOs often overlook the old cliché that says, “If you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’ll keep getting the same results.” Not only does this waste valuable time, but there can be a significant cost associated with hiring and training new people who are not a good fit for your company, whether you’re a small business or a large corporation. A tight labor market, especially challenging in high skill positions and fast growing industries, requires a change in business management, which means developing new plans to attract people before they decide to work for someone else (like your competitor).

OK, smart guy, so how do you hire better people?

I’m glad you asked...

One way is to give prospective employees what they want from a job, and to announce clearly what you offer in your help wanted advertising, instead of following the traditional method of simply listing what assets you’re looking for. Too many employers seem to think their ads need only announce the availability of work at their address, and then stand back for the flood of applicants. Well, that may be true if you’re hiring for people to keep the temperature of the building above freezing.

But if you really want to pique the interest of top notch people, you need to remember this: the word “advertising” means more than just announcing the availability of something you are selling—in this case a job. It also means enticing the “buyer” to want to buy it. In our example the buyer is the prospective employee, or more particularly the exceptional individual who will be outstandingly successful in the position. Forget the traditional thinking that you are the buyer and the applicant is the seller. This is a seller’s market, which means the roles are reversed. You must sell good people on considering your company, not simply reject the unacceptable applicants in order to get the people you need to grow.

If you accept that idea, then the next question becomes: what are some good selling tools to use?

We like some of the ideas that came out of a McKinsey & Co. report, which said that certain kinds of people are attracted by certain kinds of recruiting campaigns and that there are four kinds of messages that the best people respond to:

“Go with a winner.” For people who want a high-performing company offering a very steady income

and lots of advancement opportunities. This is the typical attraction of the big company, where size enables a company to offer more responsibility and bigger budgets at younger ages.

“Big risk, big reward.” For people attracted to an environment where they are challenged to do exceptionally well or to leave. This is the classic startup attraction.

“Save the world.” This attracts people who want a business with an inspiring mission and an exciting challenge, like high tech or biotech companies, or not-for-profits.

“Lifestyle.” People drawn to this message seek companies that offer them more flexibility and better lifestyle benefits, such as a good location or very flexible hours. Software developers are often drawn to such enticements.

Clarity about which of these your company offers should be readily apparent from reading your corporate vision/mission statement. If it isn't, or if you don't necessarily bring your vision/mission statement into the workplace, you may need to start with a strategic redirection of your company.

The best people want to work somewhere that makes a difference—to them, to the world, or both—and your business should, in our opinion, exist for similar reasons.

Find your special reason, and then tell your applicants about it.

Now you can interview for the people who are truly interested in your message, and you're on your way to hiring the very best people for your business.

Best wishes,

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