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Don't Hire Duds!

Why You Should Never Skimp on the Hiring Process, Plus Three Tips to Make Your Next Candidate Search More Successful

Your company is at the point where it needs a full-time marketing person to help with customer development. In fact, you see this position as a key role – one that's imperative to your company's growth. Sure, you're working at a speed that makes lightning seem slow, you have dozens of competing priorities, and you want to fill the position now. But before you rush through the hiring process, consider this: Once you hire people, you're stuck with them. If you get lucky and they work out, great – but if they don't, they'll slow your growth and make your team miserable, and you'll eventually likely have to create some type of time-sucking performance improvement process for them to follow. And once you work up the nerve to fire them, you'll have to start the hiring process all over again. Doesn't it make more sense to approach the hiring process as you do any other important business decision – thoughtfully and strategically? Here are three tips to guide you.

Tip #1: Assess candidates for more than just their technical skills.



"Almost anyone can learn to do a job," a former executive vice president at Pitney Bowes once told me. "Most people I've had to fire didn't lack talent; they just didn't fit in with their coworkers." It's true: Think about all the capable people you've worked with whom you just didn't like. Did

you want to collaborate on projects with them? Invite them to brainstorm? Ask them for advice? Probably not, which hinders innovation, particularly in a fledgling company. On the other hand, people who fit into the company culture will still be valuable even if the job requirements change, which happens all the time in the ever-changing world of startups. Hire for skills, sure, but also take a look at cultural fit. Your employees have to fit in with your brand.

Key tactics: During job interviews, ask the candidates what type of environment they like to work in, what type of management style they prefer, and what attracted them to your company. Try to probe for what the candidates value (work/life balance, great customer service, sustainability, etc.) and assess whether those values are in line with your company's values. Ask for – and check – references. Make sure to request to speak with both a current or former supervisor and a current or former coworker.

Tip #2: Keep career progression in mind. If you've routinely used  recruiters, you know that the good ones ask about career progression. It's a smart thing to do. When job seekers interview with your company, they're not only thinking about the job you have open now, but how they might progress within your organization as it grows. When I joined a startup right out of college, I started in sales (the only open position), but I had my eye on a public relations and marketing career.

The company had an attractive mission and was a good fit culturally, and I knew if I stayed and worked hard and the company became successful, they'd eventually add these functions, and they did. I spent a happy decade designing and running the marketing department and later freelancing for the company when I started my own firm. Had I thought there was no future for me at the company, I would have been out looking for another job, taking years of industry information with me.

Key tactics: Think not only about the position you want to fill, but also how it may progress as your company grows. Ask yourself whether, if your company were to grow rapidly, this person would be able to handle it. If you hire someone who is overqualified, will you be able to keep that person interested? Be honest about where you are and the future you envision.

Tip #3: Test candidates in real-life scenarios. To any startup,



innovation and the drive to improve the status quo should be important qualities to look for in a new hire. If, during the interview, you can get a sense that the candidate has this drive, snap him or her up. Great employees can manage themselves and are a godsend to any company, startup or not. A candidate who has talent and the motivation to succeed will know what needs to be done and have the skills to do it, walking in on day one with sleeves rolled up, ready to go, freeing you and your team up

Bonus tips from HR

executives:

- Don't do all the talking. You learn far more when you listen.
- Don't hire someone because he or she reminds you of you. Diversity breeds innovation.
- Don't oversell the position.
- Don't ask the same old questions in an interview. Ask open-ended, job-specific questions that give you a sense of the candidate's experience.
- Ask others in your company to participate in the interview process – this way, you'll get different perspectives.
- Cut bait fast if the wrong person gets through.

to do whatever it is you do best.

Key tactics: How do you find such people? During interviews, don't just ask and answer questions. Instead, give applicants a relevant case study and ask how they would handle it. This gets you away from the typical canned responses from which you learn nothing: "Well, one of my faults is that I'm a perfectionist." (Yeah, right.) You're looking for knowledge, creativity and passion. Also ask new hires, who should have done their research on the company, how they would improve [insert something vital to your company's success here]. This will allow you to see how they think on their feet, whether they've done their homework, and how they might fit in with your team. Finally, test them. If the position requires writing, ask for writing samples. If they'll be making presentations, ask them to give you one. You don't have to squeeze the process into one interview. It's perfectly okay to ask them to come back. Bottom line: You want to hire employees who will stick around and pull their weight, so do yourself and the candidates a favor and put some time and effort into making sure it's a great fit for both of you.

About the Author



[Amy Hourigan](#) oversees marketing and communications for [Connecticut Innovations](#), where she is responsible for helping to connect entrepreneurs, established businesses, investors and other stakeholders with the information they need to reach their goals. You can contact Amy at Amy.Hourigan@ctinnovations.com