
Once you master the hiring process, you may never have to fire anyone again

There are managers in Corporate America who have never had to fire an employee. They have refined and honed the hiring process to such a precise science that it's a rare occasion when a candidate doesn't succeed. There are three stages of the hiring process, and each stage has proven strategies that can use to weed out poor candidates and get new hires off on the right foot.

1 The Prehiring Process

- **Interview people who already work for you.** Pick your best employees, and talk to them. Make a list of common qualities; write profiles of perfect employees. Look for candidates who match those profiles.
- **Do your best *not* to hire anyone.** Just because you lose a worker, don't immediately assume you have to hire a replacement. Can you reassign work without overburdening people? Can you eliminate unnecessary work? Many managers who hire as a first reaction realize later that they didn't need to fill that open position and then are faced with letting go of someone.
- **The first place to look for "new" employees:** your own company. Hiring and promoting from within not only increases morale, it also gives you candidates with track records you already know—or can easily reference with other managers and HR.
- **Write down on a piece of paper:** "I will not lower my standards." Many managers get desperate after the 20th interview, and convince themselves that a particular candidate is "good enough." Put your promise to yourself where you can see it, and stick to it. Hiring subpar candidates inevitably leads to firing subpar workers.

2 The Interview Process

- **Learn to spot "producers."** Don't focus on job descriptions—anyone

can write those. Focus on specific projects they've completed and review the results. Have them talk at length about the process. Hire people with a proven production record—not fancy job descriptions.

- **Send candidates to lunch with a trusted employee after the interview.** Candidates are on their best behavior during interviews, often giving rehearsed answers to canned questions. At lunch, they let their guard down, and act more natural—especially when the interviewer isn't present. Have your trusted lieutenant brief you on the lunch.
- **Ask this question to test their maturity level:** "What were the strengths and weaknesses of your past supervisors?" If they take repeated stabs at former bosses, no matter how subtle, you may be dealing with someone who has a problem with authority.
- **Ask this question to see if they can accept blame:** "What was your biggest failure in your last job?" If the candidate puts it off on others and doesn't accept any of the responsibility, you may have a problem on your hands.
- **Use this test to see if you're dealing with a team player:** When candidates answer the above-mentioned questions regarding former employment, listen to the pronouns they use. Do they always say "I" this and "I" that? Or do they refer to "we" when talking about their former jobs? You want "we" people. It means they build strong team bonds—and probably will again, with your team.
- **Write things down!** Studies have shown that interviewers who don't take notes retain only one-fourth of what they've heard. If you're interviewing a dozen

people, you'll mix up observations and start to run every candidate together. Develop a shorthand code for writing down personal observations, characteristics you like or don't like, and so on.

3 The Initiation Process

Once you've hired the right person, the last step is crucial: Get them off on the right foot. Use these strategies to welcome new hires and turn them into productive, motivated workers right from the start.

- **Have their business cards waiting for them when they show up.** It's a great way of saying, "Welcome to the team."
- **Outfit the employee's workstation or cubicle.** Make sure the computer is up and running, and all appropriate software is already loaded; stock the desk with office supplies; put a company directory and handbook in plain view. *Extra touches:* Buy new hires a day planner, and have it waiting for them; or a company coffee mug.
- **Use the Buddy System.** Remember summer camp? Pick an employee with good communication skills and assign him or her to be the new hire's "buddy." That person is in charge of showing the employee around, going to lunch with them the first few days, explaining the company hierarchy and culture—and, most importantly, answering the many questions all new hire have.
- **Make time to meet with new hires—every day.** At least for the first week, meet with new hires for fifteen minutes at the end of every day. Make sure they're settling in, answer their questions, review their responsibilities, and so on. Let new hires know you're behind them from the beginning.