

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 you 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 candidates completed and the results. Have them talk at length about the process. Hire people with a proven production record—not fancy résumés.
- **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—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 questions above 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 built 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.** It's a great way of saying, "Welcome to the team."
- **Outfit the employee's workstation.** Make sure the computer is working and loaded with the appropriate software; stock the desk with office supplies; provide a company directory and handbook. *Extra touches:* Buy a plant or 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." Buddies are in charge of showing the new employees around, going to lunch with them the first few days, explaining the company hierarchy and culture—and, most important, answering the many questions all new hires have.
- **Make time to meet with new hires—every day.** At least for the first week, meet with new hires for 15 minutes at the end of every day: Answer their questions, review their responsibilities, and so on. Let new hires know you're behind them from the beginning.