

## Hiring Right the First Time

Research shows that on average, a hiring mistake:

- Costs the organization 40 – 60% of the hired person's annual compensation.
- Increases the learning curve to get new employees up-to-speed
- Negatively impacts production and customer service.
- Depletes morale within the organization.

No organization can afford hiring mistakes and expect to survive and grow. Eight common selection problems keep organizations from hiring the best people. First, they need to recognize the issues and then apply the tools necessary to select the best person for the job.

### **COMMON PROBLEM #1** **Interviewers have not decided upon nor organized selection criteria into a system.**

As a result, they waste time on individuals who should have been screened out of the selection process. They need to determine before the interview what the position requires in order to judge if the interviewee will provide exceptional service, fit in, and perform the job. Also, using different selection criteria for different candidates puts some people at a disadvantage. And it's costly to redefine the job after flying applicants in for interviews.

In your interviewing process, define and quantify the information you are seeking. Some categories include:

- Experience
- Integrity
- Gratuities/bribery and knowing the difference
- Service attitude/response
- Driving history
- Shift work with regard to attitude/commitment
- Reliability and retention

Create a mathematical weighting system to measure candidates' qualifications. For example the most important item should have the highest number. When you add

the numbers of the criteria, you will determine an objective measurement.

### **COMMON PROBLEM #2** **Interviewers miss important information.**

They focus on only a few areas critical to job success while overlooking many others; and consequently fail to get a complete picture of the candidate. Does this person have the emotional maturity and ability to handle corrective feedback? What personal traits are necessary to be a star team player?

Define your information criteria. Ask yourself, "What do I really want to know – and why?" Initiative, teamwork, problem solving and enthusiasm are all subjects for questioning and separating average from exceptional performance.

#### **Initiative**

Initiative demonstrates a willingness to take action when necessary, to anticipate what is needed, to do more than is required and, if possible, to find ways to get others to do jobs faster and better. Initiative is the ability to perform delegated work without requiring close supervision and having the confidence to do a good job. To determine initiative in a candidate, the interviewer might say: "Tell me about a time when you went out of your way to handle a problem that you discovered."

#### **Work relationships and teamwork**

Team players strive to build and maintain good working relationships with their boss and fellow employees. They work effectively as a member of a team. An example interview question could be, "What are important things to consider when working as part of a team? Can you think of an exceptional team experience you had?"

#### **Problem Solving**

Problem solving requires the ability to determine the root cause of a problem and find solutions. To uncover this trait, present a problem that your operation encountered and ask the candidate how he/she would handle it.

#### **Enthusiasm**

"Hire for attitude; train for skill" is the motto at Southwest Airlines. When the applicant describes previous positions, can you detect disgruntlement or appreciation of former team members and work opportunities?

**COMMON PROBLEM #3**  
**Interviewers overlook job motivation and organizational fit.**

We tend to overlook candidates' likes and dislikes. Failure to determine motivation can lead to poor job performance and rapid turnover.

Understanding the culture of your company helps promote employee retention. An employee once said, "I want to look elsewhere, I don't fit in here. This place is filled with young guys who play golf and softball together, have shrimp bakes on Fridays and watch football on Sundays. I've been there, done that, and now want to be with my family. I'm there to work, not make friends."

Look around. How would someone describe your organizational environment? Will a GM from New York fit in with your guys in Louisiana? Will the Texas salesman succeed with your New York clientele? Or, how about the female mechanic confronted with an "old boy" network?

It's a balancing act. On one hand, you don't want to place a new employee in a job environment in which he/she doesn't fit. On the other, it's proven that a diverse work force brings more creativity, depth of insight and problem-solving to an organization. When branching out and developing that diversity, educate your team in diversity issues that promote growth, acceptance and success.

How do you find out about the values and social or cultural preferences of a person? Ask: What do you like to do in your time off? What are some of your favorite travel/vacation destinations? If you had all the time and money, what would you do? Did you ever play a sport or musical instrument when you were a kid?

These questions can uncover values, interests, likes and dislikes; can determine who is a team player, a lone ranger, an optimist, a pessimist, an adventurer or a

watcher. The bottom line is does this person fit?

**COMMON PROBLEM #4**  
**Interviewers ask illegal, non-job-related questions.**

These questions expose the organization to lawsuits and put some candidates at an unfair disadvantage.

The candidate being interviewed was asked, "Are you Jewish?" The owner, having financial interests in several religious-based companies, had flown in for the finalists' interview. The candidate abruptly turned down the offer and spread the word across her network.

During the job-design stage in a CFO search for a German-owned U.S. repair station, it became apparent that anyone who was female, black, overweight or Jewish would not be considered. Other examples of illegality are owners wanting only candidates in the under-forty crowd. Another wants the fifty-something set for the age of the workforce. Very few want people near retirement. All these situations are illegal, but in the real world they are perpetrated again and again. To assist an interviewer in this touchy area, here are some topics to avoid during the interview.

- National origin, birthplace, or ancestry. (You can ask whether the applicant is legally permitted to work in the U.S.)
- Race
- Religion
- Age
- Marital Status
- Family and Children
- Financial Situation (credit rating, current loans, or mortgages, wage garnishment history, etc.)
- Arrest Record
- Disabilities
- Status of military discharge
- The mentioning or listing of memberships in clubs or organizations other than those related to the job
- Sexual Orientation

Don't ask direct questions about an aspect of the applicant's personal life that you believe may affect his/her work.

Instead, ask if there is anything that may affect the applicant's job performance. If

you are concerned about an applicant's family or religious responsibilities conflicting with his/her availability for work, ask the applicant if there are any reasons other than occasional illness that could get in the way of working the expected schedule.

One benefit of using a professional search firm is that they can uncover these areas of concern for you.

#### **COMMON PROBLEM #5**

##### **Candidates are turned off by process.**

When interviewers talk too much or are arrogant, rude, or disorganized, they see their job offers rejected, their candidates going elsewhere and their organization's reputation damaged.

Put yourself in the candidate's shoes. One VP/GM candidate was left cooling his heels at the airport for nearly an hour. After he arrived at the facility, he then waited another near-hour in the lobby before being shown into the H.R.'s office. It didn't take him long to realize that she knew nothing about the business. His lunch meeting with the president was cancelled and his rescheduled meeting in the afternoon was called off as well. It seemed that there were fires to be extinguished. He was then shuttled to the airport three hours before his departure.

Then there was the maintenance salesman who'd taken a vacation day and rearranged his family's schedule to attend a final interview. On the flight, he found himself sitting next to the other candidate finalist. They rode the van together, checked into the same hotel and were picked up together in the morning. They even met each other crossing in the hallways. Did they talk? They compared notes on their flight back.

There is no excuse for rudeness, callousness lack of preparedness, or disorganization -- none. Yes, crises happen. Customer issues do come first. However, three minutes to explain the situation and offer an apology go a long way toward good will. When we treat our candidates with the same respect as we would our customers, we receive more than double the payback.

#### **Framing an Interview**

#### **1. Set the proper tone for the interview.**

- Arrange to greet your management-level candidates at the airport. Provide a key person to take them to dinner if they are on their own.
- In advance, send an agenda to candidates and interviewers. Distribute resumes and decide what questions to ask during the interview. Make sure the interviewing team agrees as to what's being evaluated.
- Greet the applicant as a guest in your office.
- Get off to a pleasant start with some friendly conversation (approx. 5 min.).

#### **2. Respect confidentiality.**

- Guard their privacy. Most exceptional candidates are being recruited away from a current employer.

#### **3. Tell the applicant about the position and the company.**

- Explain the organization and the position expectations.

#### **4. Begin the interview by briefly clarifying background information found on the resume.**

- Focus the interview on the applicant's performance and experience in previous jobs.
- Let the applicant do most of the talking—you ask the questions.
- Take notes.

#### **5. Know your lunch objectives.**

- Make the best use of this relaxed time. A one-on-one provides quality time for in-depth questioning. A foursome creates an opportunity for close interaction with an executive team and owners. Inviting the supervisors and managers to a catered lunch promotes a team approach, gets "buy-in" from direct reports, and allows the candidate to get a feel for your culture.

**6. Close the interview on a positive note.**

- Let the applicant ask questions.
- Provide the applicant with a timeframe or follow-up.
- Tell the candidate what to expect. Chances are your number one candidate is also being courted by the competition. If you're holding a candidate as an alternate in case number one turns you down, make sure s/he knows you are still interested, but that you have to finish the interviewing process with other candidates.

Remember, your candidates are your emissaries. How well they are treated will be advertised to your competition and customers.

**COMMON PROBLEM #6  
Interviewers misinterpret candidate information.**

Interviewers often misinterpret data when they play "amateur psychologist" and guess at the meaning behind a candidate's response. This leads interviewers to attribute to candidates incorrect qualities and characteristics. Identify the information value in objective, quantifiable terms: "What information provides what I want to know?"

We all practice the art of "reading" human non-verbal behavior. While there are experts in the field and special techniques can be taught to enhance the ability and accuracy of behavior analysis, they should never be the sole determinant in making hiring decisions. In reality, many of us rely on unsubstantiated impressions, hunches, gut-level instincts and feelings in our hiring decisions. Our "diagnosis" should be used only as a guide to ask questions for accurate information. That way, applicants are judged more objectively and fairly. We also must realize that there is a difference between subjective analysis and objective testing.

No one likes to be "pigeon-holed" into a psychological box. Personality/skill assessments seem to do just that; but they also reveal traits that may or may not be desirable for a particular role.

A maintenance manager who had been with an oil company for 17 years was "downsized" as the company sold off part of its fleet. He was hired as a Maintenance Manager for an FBO/repair station. Within six months, the GM let him go because he couldn't grow the business--which was a significant responsibility for that position. In interviewing for another position, he was asked what sales meant to him, he said, "You join the local Chamber and go to after-hours meetings, play golf with customers and make sure you return calls promptly." After taking a profile assessment, the candidate was informed of his results. "Bob, you may want to do sales, but your profile shows someone who is uncomfortable with that. Sales is about hitting the pavement and convincing people to change their provider." His response was, "I wouldn't be good doing that." Through an understanding of his true strengths and work style preferences, he found happiness in a position that better-suited his temperament.

There is a place for everyone, but not necessarily in your current opening or even in your company's modus operandi.

A smorgasbord of personality and skills assessments are available--even on the Internet. Make sure the ones you choose are proven, have historical data, and are developed by professional organizational psychologists. When administered by knowledgeable people, they are useful as a hiring guideline and assist with the questioning process and reference checking. They can be potentially damaging if delivered and reviewed by untrained personnel.

Job skills get you in the door, but human traits determine success. Go beyond the historical data of the resume and use questions and case studies to probe for concrete examples supporting positive character traits.

**COMMON PROBLEM #7  
Pressure to fill a position affects judgment.**

Standards are lowered. Interviewers decide to take someone not fully qualified for a job and feel they can offset limitations through training or close supervision.

Many selection systems completely fail to even target the information that predicts future work-related behavior. They also use information-gathering methods that are ineffective in providing accurate information. In general, applicants may tend to misrepresent information regarding the most critical information. Applicants say they are looking for a new career opportunity when in reality they have been fired for rudeness to customers, inattention to results, inappropriate sexual behavior, embezzlement, sexual harassment, intimidation, rape, alcohol use, and bribery.

Why interview for accurate information? Time, cost, liability, reputation, team morale, and productivity. Because they do not hire often, many employers are not skilled in the interviewing process. They won't ask questions regarding counter-productive behavior if they do not understand the work-related basis for the question. And because they, themselves, do not engage in such disqualifying behavior, they assume that most applicants are essentially similar to themselves. During the interviewing process, listen for these categories of misrepresented information:

**Exaggeration:** attempt to overstate accomplishments or attributes.

**Fabrication:** make up non-existent facts.

**Omission:** leave out critical facts or perceived harmful information.

**Deceptive denial:** refute or maintain a statement of fact is in error

Pay attention to the Triangle Answer. Listen for three things: Situation, Action they took, and Results of their action. For example, "We had an AOG and the part wasn't stocked. The pilot was pretty upset. I drove to the next repair station about two hours away and then to the airport where a friend of mine flew me and the part to the customer. We had him up and running in about eight hours. He referred several customers from that. I did for him what I'd do for anyone."

Take Notes. Why? We only recall 10% of what we hear and 40% of what we hear and record. Tell your candidates you will be taking notes throughout the interview and invite them to do the same. When done correctly, note-taking makes people feel important. Write notes openly, but

keep them private. Note only pertinent information and record behavior, not your psychological interpretation. You don't want the candidate to think you are noting only negative impressions, so use your own shorthand and write key words.

Where there is evidence of motivation, initiative, and problem-solving traits, underline them. Where there is information discrepancy, circle it to refer to later. For example, if a sales position requires travel three out of four weeks and you detect the candidate's dislike for that much travel, ask for reasons. Look for what motivates each person. Even the most motivated of us dislike some aspects of our jobs.

### **COMMON PROBLEM #8 Conduct insufficient reference and background checks.**

Interviews are excellent tools in choosing an employee; however, other sources provide essential information. Reference-checking is necessary, tricky and sometimes misleading. Our industry is a very close, tight-knit group, and people know people. That is why it's tricky. Candidates don't want to jeopardize their current position while considering your opportunity.

The line manager of an FBO learned they were interviewing a possible sales candidate. Thinking he'd help out, he called his buddy/counterpart at the candidate's company to check on the salesman's reputation. Word got around, and the company lost a desired candidate. The candidate's reputation suffered in his company. Inform only those personnel on a "need to know" basis for highly confidential recruiting.

Reference-checking is best done when the finalist is selected. Inform the candidate that s/he is being offered the position contingent upon good references. Conduct a 360 degree reference check – managers, direct reports and colleagues. Reference-checking is time-consuming and should be done by someone who knows what selection criteria is required.

The owner of an FBO/repair station was interviewing a VP candidate for sales and marketing. He personally knew the president of the candidate's current

company. The president had no problem allowing the candidate to make a move up and gave him an exceptional reference; but with advice that the candidate needed clear direction to be successful. In six months, the FBO owner was frustrated because the candidate wasn't "taking the bull by the horns," and the owner felt the reference had been misleading. In reality, he had not heeded the warning.

Background checks address academic, military, criminal, credit, drug and driving history. NATA's Compliance Services offers the best, most comprehensive, cost-effective methods in our industry. To find out more about the service, contact NATA or go to their website [www.nata-online.org](http://www.nata-online.org).

At the end of a successful process, you will have a candidate who can add new ideas and energy to your company, and you've given the person a new home to build his career.

Remember, by hiring a person smarter than you, you've proven you're smarter than him.

About the author:

Jodie Brown, M.A. is founder and president of Summit Solutions. With more than a decade devoted to business aviation, doctoral work in organization communication and corporate mediation, and more than twenty-five years of leadership and managerial training for universities and fortune 100 companies, Jodie understands the expertise needed in recruiting candidates for leadership and management roles.

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