

Hiring for the Long Term

By Vicki Z. Lauter

Before launching a search for a senior-level manager, take time to figure out the skills, behaviors and values that will best fit your organization.

In today's throwaway society, many organizations believe if they get two or three years of employment from a new hire, they have recouped their investment. In reality, organizations incur tremendous expenses in hiring and training higher-level managers and the only way to maximize the return on this investment is to retain productive employees.

To get the most out of hiring, an organization needs to strategically align its hiring needs with the talents of the individual. By investing on the front end of the hiring process—before advertising for a position and interviewing candidates business leaders create greater accountability for the open position within the organization and reap maximum return by retaining a candidate who can produce results and grow in their organizations.

Disposable Employees

Studies have proven it costs an organization more in time, resources and overhead to hire for the short term. A 2001 survey by the Hay Group, "Retention Dilemma," estimated that turnover can cost employers as much as 40 percent of annual profits.

All of us come to a new job with natural strengths and challenges. By assessing candidates and jobs, we can match those candidates that best correlate to the needs of the *job* and the *culture* of the organization. When this alignment occurs, both the employee and the organization benefit through an enjoyable, productive work environment. When we hire only for skills, we end up firing for attitudes.

Take time to figure out what sort of person—as well as what set of skills—your organization needs. Envision the kind of candidate who will be ideal for your organization years down the road. Then, and only then, go out and find that person.

On the other hand, if you haven't projected the future of this position, maybe you don't need a permanent employee. Hire a contract employee instead.

Recruiting Strategy

I strongly recommend that organizations develop a recruiting strategy for open positions, one that they use each time they need to fill a senior management position.

Start the process by gathering all key stakeholders together to discuss the ideal candidate. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is this employee meant to accomplish?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of this position?
- What personality will be the best fit for this position?
- Which departments will be communicating with and through this individual?
- What are the business goals of this position, and how will this person's performance be evaluated?

Once you've answered these questions, devise the ideal candidate characteristics through a system of benchmarking. Benchmarking helps you identify the behaviors, values and culture of a job, as well as the specific responsibilities and expectations for the open position.

Furthermore, creating a benchmark based on current top performers can be an unexpected minefield. It is not uncommon to discover that performance improvements are possible by benchmarking the job itself, not the manner in which a current top performer is doing the job. If your current staff consists of B-level performers, and you benchmark them, your future expectation will be more B-level employees.

Candidate Assessment

When you're ready to interview candidates, have applicants for the position complete an assessment to determine their fit for current and future roles in the company. All candidates will be compared against the benchmarks to determine the best fit for long-term success within the organization.

The process helps focus on the strengths of individuals and on the challenges of the position. It also helps streamline the interview process, so all involved in hiring know the goals of the position as well as the method for evaluating the new employee's performance. Candidates whose natural talents and skills align with the needs of the position become an organization's best choice for long-term employment.

Assessments should also be used during performance evaluations. This is a valuable aid in determining promotions or lateral moves within the organization.

A Better Approach

Short-term "fill the job" thinking often results in having people in positions that are in conflict with their natural talents and values. This commonly leads to burnout.

When employees find a natural match between their strengths and the needs of the position, they flourish. Going into a new role with accountabilities clearly spelled out instills a sense of confidence and focused motivation for employees. They feel in control of their success and responsible for the betterment of their organization. There is a stronger sense of loyalty, thereby establishing long-term opportunities for continued employment with the company.

Everyone working toward the same business goals ... that's just crazy enough to work.