

Avoid the most common interviewing mistakes

Current statistics suggest that on average, hiring the wrong person for the job costs an organization at least 2-1/2 times the employee's salary. This doesn't include less measurable costs such as low morale and loss of customers.

As managers, many of us never receive formal training on how to interview successfully. How hard can it be - sit down and get to know the person, right? Wrong - it is much more complex than that!

Let's take Lorraine, a hiring manager at a financial services firm. She is down one person on her staff and work is piling up. She is also swamped with budget review and quarter-end tasks herself. If only she could find someone quickly to pick up the slack...

Good news - a co-worker knows someone, who knows someone, who submitted a resume. She looks like a good candidate who can start right away.

It's Tuesday morning and as Lorraine is preparing for an important meeting, the receptionist reminds her that this candidate is in the lobby for the interview.

Lorraine has ten minutes to spare before her meeting. After glancing at the resume, she asks the candidate to come into her office. The candidate presents herself well and seems to have all the "right answers". Lorraine feels that she is "perfect" for the job and extends an offer. What a relief.

Two weeks later, Lorraine and the whole staff realize this person isn't right for the job.

The manager in this scenario just made the two most common mistakes. Can you relate?

#1 Not devoting enough time:

- Prepare in advance by writing down what qualities a person needs to be successful in the position - then prioritize. What are the most important, "must-have" qualities you are looking for? (*Wouldn't you do this if you were purchasing a new computer or phone system?*)
- Create open-ended questions customized to the key qualities you are looking for. (*For example: "Tell me about a time when you handled multiple priorities - what were they and how did you manage it?"*)
- Set aside concentrated time to review resumes and applications to find red-flags, discrepancies, and vague areas to probe in the interview.

- Don't short-change the importance of face-to-face interview time - what management task is more important than finding the right person? You are better off with no one in the job than the wrong person in the job.

#2 Succumbing to the Halo Effect:

- Don't be so desperate for a "warm body" that you see what you want to see or hear what you want to hear. (*And put a halo over the candidate's head.*)
- Probe a candidate's answers to hear specific examples, not generalities that sound good. Give yourself permission to be a bit skeptical and not give the benefit of the doubt.
- Seek out the candidate's limitations and weaknesses to gain a more balanced picture of the person. If you think they are "perfect", you haven't obtained enough information about this person to make an objective decision. No one is perfect.

Lastly, as "Good to Great" author Jim Collins says, "When in doubt, don't hire - keep looking." The cost of a poor hiring decision is just too high.