

## State of Mind - March 2008

*Last week I posted a job opening for my business on a national database. The position I am seeking to fill is critical to the future of my company. In the past, I have used "headhunter firms." The résumés look great and the candidates interview well; but more often than not, things just don't work out. Anything I can do better?*

This is a critical question asked by many employers. Not only can this problem be emotionally draining, it actually has real dollars associated with it. In fact, developing an existing employee costs about one third of what it would take to replace someone and about one tenth the cost of litigation, should things go terribly wrong.

By taking a few proactive steps, you may be able to avoid employing the wrong person and use valuable information gleaned during the hiring process to develop "raw" talent. Finding the right person to fill any position is daunting. To find a key employee is even more overwhelming. The solution begins with "Job Matching", and it is a critical factor in assuring success for all parties.

It all starts with the hiring process. First, you need to develop a thorough job description that considers knowledge and skills as well as behavioral factors essential to the job. This should be developed along with requirements for the position and without consideration of a particular person. Posting the job in the usual places (newspapers, Internet) is common practice, but it is strongly advised that professional networks be used as well to identify possible candidates that might not otherwise come to your attention.

Starting with the initial posting, specific instructions should be given. This might include demanding a typed letter addressed to a specific person that goes no longer than one page. The idea is to determine if the applicant is attentive to details and is not just taking a shotgun approach to finding a job. My practice is to dump anyone who fails to comply with directives; makes errors of facts like dates and names; fails to correct blatant typos; starts most paragraphs with "I", and demonstrates no sophistication in writing style.

As hard as it may be to believe, a large percent of job seekers distort or even LIE on their résumés. So, accuracy should be checked. While the law does limit what previous employers are allowed to reveal, checking the veracity of claimed employment is highly recommended. Along that line, commercially available background checks are not a bad idea. Any discrepancies must be clarified.

It is important to have as much information on the front end as possible, because nearly all employers make significant mistakes during the interview process. Thus, planning the questions and timeframe are essential. All candidates should run the same gauntlet. Behavioral interviews focused on job-related scenarios are advised. Again, you must be very prepared and consistent so you are making meaningful comparisons.

The use of pre-employment assessments is also strongly encouraged. There are many instruments available, though care must be taken to be sure that the assessments are designed for use in work-related settings. These will address areas of concern relevant to the hiring process and may also be used later as a coaching tool. Adherence to standards covered under federal and state laws is mandatory. If your company does not have an appropriately trained human resource professional, then find a consultant who has knowledge of testing for employment. One of the more exciting aspects of using the best-designed assessments is that they can be tailored for each position. Thus, the results are focused on the way in which the candidates actually fit the profile of skills and job-related attributes. It is important that all candidates be asked to take the assessment(s) at the same point in the hiring process. No test results should be the sole determinant of your decision.

Also, whether you “like” someone or not should be the last thing considered. Good impressions are like lighter fluid on charcoal – lots of flames that don’t last and never produce heat. Moreover, some very qualified people interview poorly, and eliminating them from the pool may be your loss.

Once your new employee is chosen, it is critical that she/he understand the demands of the job and what you expect. Some new employees coming straight out of college think that the degree is a passport to the executive suite and become indignant when asked to perform tasks they consider beneath them. When they have been given a clear description of the position and the duties expected of them, then they have no room to complain and you have grounds to address less than adequate performance. Similarly, very experienced workers may have problems adjusting to a new company and may feel as if they do not have to prove themselves to a new boss and colleagues.

Even when all these steps are taken, problems can still arise. A number of studies have shown that finding a way to mentor an employee with potential is a cost-effective endeavor. However, keeping a bad fit can have untold negative

consequences both within and outside your organization. Disgruntled customers and alienated coworkers may drain you of financial and emotional resources. No one likes to let an employee go, but delaying such action might result in damage that will take excessive effort to repair. Here are your options with the associated costs:

- Counseling for the employee - \$4,000
- "Can" the employee and hire a new employee - \$13,000 (According to Saratoga Institute.)
- Court action filed by the employee - \$35,000

If common sense does not convince you, then go back to the direct costs and figure in the indirect expenditures to see what this investment of time and energy can bring to your bottom line. It's easy to see how proactive measures and early intervention in personnel matters are critical to the success of your company.