

Three ways to dramatically improve hiring decisions

By Hilary Sayers on 29th November 2016

Three ways to dramatically improve hiring decisions

Think about your organisation's success rate in hiring new people. Looking back over the last year, how many new hires met your expectations once they were in the job and how many fell short?

No matter how you respond, you know that every new hire or promotion counts. Talent matters. The people you appoint will have an impact on productivity, morale, innovation and much more. Given the financial implications, getting the selection right is a fundamental managerial responsibility.

One problem with hiring the best talent is the statistical probability of it happening at all. Most human attributes such as intelligence, personality and skills are normally distributed across the familiar bell curve. Most people are in the middle, with few superstars at the upper end.

A sobering thought is that you must do something special to find those people. Otherwise it's likely that your new employees will be average and this isn't going to drive high performance or deliver a competitive advantage for your organisation.

What's needed is a rigorous approach that includes three essential components – knowing exactly what you are looking for, using a planned and structured interview process and training hiring managers in selection techniques.

1. Sharpen the focus on what you are looking for

The analysis of a job is a straightforward process, provided you invite the right people to participate. They must know the role well enough to accurately identify the skills and behaviour that are critical for success.

Beyond this, they need a robust set of competencies, whether custom built or derived from an existing model, so they have a common way to describe the skills and behaviours that matter most.

Ensure they have a robust debate about the job and its deliverables, then drive for consensus on the few competencies that will make the biggest difference to performance. Gather evidence from your experience and from competency research to validate your choices.

2. Thoroughly prepare for the interview so you can better evaluate candidates

It is well-recognised that a structured, behaviour-based approach to interviewing consistently leads to better results in identifying the right person for the job.

A structured interview requires a set of questions around the competencies for the job and an understanding of what the interviewer is looking for. All candidates should be asked the same questions, for fairness and equity in comparing candidates.

Ensure hiring managers do not default to their own favourite interview questions. Encourage them to focus on the interview guide you have provided, listen more than talk and take notes so they have better recall when they are evaluating candidates.

3. Upskill hiring managers in best-practice selection techniques

There are several reasons why managers may have trouble hiring the right people. They may lack experience or have a narrow or biased view on what talent looks like.

Sometimes, they can be impatient to fill a job or simply reluctant to let an average candidate go and put more effort into searching for a better one.

Interviewing is a complex process that requires the application of a range of skills and training hiring managers gives them the opportunity to reflect on their own capacity to make well informed decisions. Structured interviews also involve a discipline that must be learned and practiced.

If these three components of hiring sound like common sense, they are. However, it takes commitment and persistence to implement them well across an organisation.