

## Finding the needle – effective hiring strategies

By Barbara Brown

Staffing is most challenging, costly, and important task any manager performs. Without the right people, no amount of money can make an organization succeed. Hiring the wrong person can have a detrimental impact far in excess of one position or one set of tasks.

The goal of staffing is three-fold, find someone who: **can** do the job, **wants** to do the job, and **will do** the job. A company reaches its staffing goals by identifying potential employees, interviewing them, hiring them and preparing them to be contributors to the organization through effective orientation and training.

### Where should you begin your staffing search?

The first task in finding the right person is to clearly define the tasks or role to be met by the new hire. You should specify up front what you want the person to do for your organization and how you will measure their success. Once defined at a high level, it is useful to brainstorm the skills and experience necessary to accomplish the job with others in the organization.

For example, if someone is already doing the job or a similar job, they are an excellent resource in helping to understand what the new person must be able to do. Write down the job tasks, skills required, and performance measures to be used. The exercise of writing this information down will support your solicitation of applicants, your interviewing, and your final selection.

A real job description offers several advantages:

- The tasks you want done and how you will evaluate their successful execution helps narrow your search and eventual selection
- The job description provides repeatable structure for interviews and provides the basis of an employee's initial evaluation
- A concise, detailed job description helps a candidate self select in or out of your interview offer

You must be scrupulously honest in your job description. In addition to tasks, consider and share expectations for aspects of the job that will be potentially inconvenient to having a personal life such as amount of travel required, overtime anticipated, demanding project schedules, and typical work week expectations.

### Where do you find qualified applicants?



Seek job candidates through those venues most likely to be known by your ideal candidate. In a technology driven organization, consider using on-line job posting organizations such as Monster, Yahoo! Hot Jobs, CareerBuilder or Dice. If you need a more senior professional, use the listings available through professional organizations and referrals.

One good place to find candidates is in your own backyard. Your existing staff understands the organization's mission and knows what it is like to work there. They are an excellent resource in seeking potential new hires. Finally, consider having a search agency help you—but beware; professional search agency services do not come cheap.

When you find a promising candidate, respond quickly to their application. Before scheduling a face-to-face interview, screen the candidate on the phone. Do not waste your time on someone who, with a little investigation, you can determine does not fit your needs or your organization.

### **Interviews: verification of capability and compatibility**

Interviews must be two way communications. You want to provide the applicant with information about the job expectations and about the company. You should describe what it is like to work at your company, how you evaluate performance, and the career path from the position for which the applicant is applying. Try to find out if the applicant can do the job, wants to do the job and will fit into the team. The answers to these questions are sometimes subjective. So, it is strongly recommended that applicants interview with several people including the hiring supervisor, someone in a similar job, a human resource representative, and a senior manager in order to get a broader opinion base.



When listening to the answers to questions, look for affirmation that the applicant understands the job requirements and is willing to make a commitment to the project and the organization. Consider the questions the applicant asks you. Is he curious about the company's future? Or, does he seem more concerned about his benefits and working conditions. Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge about your company based on research done before the interview?

Keep in mind that a candidate may have all the needed skills and attitudes but still not fit the project or the organization. Ask yourself if this person can work effectively in your environment and if you, personally, would like to work with them.

### **Closing the deal**

After the interviews are completed, the person in charge of hiring should collect the interview impressions from everyone involved. If you use a structured write up, require all interviewers provide that within 8 hours of the interview. Rank the candidates and make your selection.

*A Word of caution:* Before you make an offer, check references. Of course, you should talk with the references listed on the employment application or resume, but that is not enough. You need to talk with previous employers – if they will talk with you. And, you need to formally verify claims about education and licensure.

Your offer of employment is most effective when it is personal—a phone call or meeting. This direct action should then be followed or accompanied by a written offer. Beyond the formal interaction, take advantage of informal communications and encouragement from the hiring supervisor or project manager. You have made your decision about which applicant is the best fit for your company's needs; now you need to make the sale.