

Hiring: Finding a Good Match

By John Durel

Hiring is a process through which we try to make a good match between the requirements of the position and the talents and traits of the candidate. Plan the process carefully to increase the likelihood of a good match.

Although one person may make the ultimate decision, it is best that a team help to design the process and select the best candidate. The decider should have the benefit of other points of view before making such an important decision.

1. The team defines what is meant by a “good match” for this position.
 - a. Describe in some detail the knowledge and technical skills a candidate must have in order to perform the job in an exemplary way. Do not think of just minimum requirements.
 - b. Describe the kind of person you want, in terms of values, behavior, attitude and style.
 - i. What are the basic values and behavior that anyone joining this organization should have? Think of such attributes as self-motivated, self-disciplined, positive outlook, likes people, likes learning new things, able to express feelings without hurting relationships, etc.
 - ii. What particular work style or traits would be best for this particular position: attention to detail, outgoing personality, follow through, innovative, comfortable with ambiguity, etc.
 - iii. Consider using the Qm² PAEI work style assessment to help define the job.
2. Once the job is defined, the team thinks of ways in which it might learn if a candidate has the right qualities for a good match. Some possibilities:
 - a. Conduct situational interviews:
 - i. For a financial manager position, give the candidate a sample (or real) financial report and ask her to interpret it, point out items of concern, and make recommendations for further analysis. Attempt to see if she understands both the details and the big picture.
 - ii. For an administrative assistant, give the candidate an email from the Executive Director, who is at a meeting in another city. Tomorrow he will fly to yet another city, and the next day he will make a pitch to a major foundation. The proposal was not complete when the director left town for the meeting. The email asks the administrative assistant to ensure that the proposal is complete, make the requisite number of copies, and get it to the hotel where the director will be staying the

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night before he meets with the foundation. Ask the candidate how she would go about handling this request. Attempt to see how thorough her approach is. Does she think of all the details, including calling the hotel to ensure that the package has arrived?

- b. Conduct multiple interviews, in different settings, with different people doing the interviews. In advance ensure that all the interviewers know what you are looking for in terms of a good match, so that they can make appropriate assessments.
 - c. Spend a significant amount of informal time with the candidate, so that you have a chance to observe their behavior. Do this away from the office. Note their body language, eye contact, vocabulary, etc. – both verbal and nonverbal clues as to who they are. Talk to them about what is important to them, to see if their values fit the job and the organization. By learning about how they spend their time, can you discover if they are open to learning new things? (If they are closed-minded they may have trouble adapting, and may resist your efforts to help them improve.) Can you get a sense as to whether they are emotionally mature, that is are they aware of their own and other's emotions – or do they just talk about ideas and things? These qualities only come out if you spend enough time with the candidate. This is where you will develop a better gut instinct about the candidate.
 - d. If you used the PAEI style assessment to define the job, ask the candidate to complete the assessment and then discuss it with him/her. Alternatively, you can use the assessment to craft questions or define cues to look for when observing the candidate.
 - e. To see if the candidate has the requisite skills, ask them to complete a task that makes use of the skills.
3. Reference checks: talk to people whom the candidate has not given you as a reference.
- a. Without letting them know exactly what you are looking for, ask them to talk about the candidate. What are the candidate's strengths? If they don't mention the skills and qualities you are looking for, it's a sign that the candidate does not have them.
 - b. Ask if they would hire the candidate? If so, for what kind of job. Does this match the job you have open?

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4. After you have conducted the interviews and checked references, and think you have someone you would like to hire, stop! Take time to bring the hiring team together to troubleshoot the choice.
 - a. What are you missing? What don't you know about this person?
 - b. What could go wrong if you hired this person? How would you respond? How would they respond?
 - c. Would hiring this person have any bad side-effects in the organization?
 - d. Have an honest dialogue with the team. What does each team member's gut say? Are there any red flags?
 - e. You should have some reservations about any candidate. If the person looks perfect, you probably are not seeing everything.
 - f. Troubleshooting may lead you to change your mind, but maybe not. Even if you have reservations, you may decide to go ahead and make the offer. Troubleshooting gives you a greater awareness of what might happen, so that you are better prepared if it does.

5. After the hire you should expect a honeymoon, to be followed by a time of conflict or disagreement. Usually this takes about four months.
 - a. In your first meeting with the new hire, talk about the inevitability of the honeymoon being followed by conflict. Talk about how you will handle it when it occurs. Set ground rules: no blaming, open dialogue, a desire to improve.
 - b. This period of conflict sets the stage for a fruitful, lasting relationship with the new employee. This is the time to begin the ongoing process of coaching and improvement.
 - c. Of course, it may become clear to either party – but more likely both parties will recognize – that the match is not a good one. With healthy dialogue this will become clear, and the recourse will be either to change the job, or to let the person go.