

HIRING RIGHT



Recruitment professionals weigh in with their secrets to making the perfect choice.

By Kathleen Dreesen

Every boss has done it at least once: hire the perfect job candidate with loads of experience—and it just doesn't work out. But according to the U.S. Department of Labor, hiring the wrong entry-level person costs between \$5,000 and \$7,000 after three months. Mis-hiring a \$20,000-per-year supervisor costs about \$40,000. Mis-hiring a \$100,000 per year manager costs about \$300,000. These losses are estimated based on wasted salary, benefits, severance pay, recruiter fees, training costs and hiring time. There are also the incalculable losses of company morale, client dissatisfaction and the boss's loss of self-confidence.

So how do you hire the right person? We talked to four high-level recruitment and placement executives to learn the secrets of a good hire.

PRODUCTION EXPERIENCE
PRODUCER (FREELANCE)
CREDITS
COMPANY INFORMATION
ADDITIONAL REFERENCES
OTHER EXPERIENCE
EDUCATION
INTERESTS

Esport in... logical, social, and political... Ability to anticipate and creatively...
sc... programs. S... ed... keep... news... forms... and prepared. January 1995 to present.
Production Company
Harvey Wang
Leo Kocking
Bobby Sheehan
Lopes Picture Company
See Spot Run / Metro Pictures
H.S.I.
Naked Project
Celsius Films
Bedford Falls
H.S.I.
PRODUCER (FREELANCE)
Diverse, extensive... sound with a... of prod... companies and... makers.
familiar with lo... and travel jobs... 1990 to... 1997.
Production Com...
KRM Production
Backyard Pro...
Draw Dogs
DIRECTOR OF AMERICA... First Assistant Director. April 20...
Owner of Crook... ve... productions, film... production service... company for fi...
TV networks, ag... y... ve directors, s... photographers... corporate...
Client
Storandt Pann M... colis...
The Gardner Nel... Pr...
History Channel
Oxygen Media
Mundy Photography
Dire...
M... aywell
Tom... elson
Bruce Koken
Glenn Schuster
Michael Mundy

Executive Producer
Mark Rosenberg
Bob Fisher
Joe Masi
Bob Fisher
R... Lopes
C... Earls
M... e... Can...
Joe Masi
Bob Fisher
Mary Beth Ferensic
Elizabeth Spinzia
Produce...
Mala Vas...
Kris Mat...
Neil Hall...
Project T...
Comm...
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FINDING A FIT

Selecting the best candidate starts long before the interview.

“It’s important that the person doing your hiring or recruiting has a really good understanding of the company culture,” says Jennifer Laxton, senior partner of Executive Search Associates in Santa Rosa. “Retail, for example, is a very fast-paced environment. You have to be able to work in that kind of culture and enjoy that fast, exciting, dynamic environment where everything is changing. You have to be looking for that type of person. You wouldn’t take somebody from a research company, where processes are slower and try and fit them into that culture. It’s important not only to find the right skills and experience, but the right culture fit as well.”

Laxton says when a client company comes to her, the representative should be prepared with information about the history of the company, its revenue, organizational structure and financial health. They have to be able to describe the culture and who they think would be the best fit.

“Usually, in small companies, it’s somebody who can wear a lot of hats and is very diversified and flexible,” says Laxton, who’s been in the recruiting business for 20 years. “The main question companies need to ask themselves when they’re recruiting is, ‘What problem are we trying to solve?’ From there, they can find a solution.

But if you don’t know what problem you’re trying to solve, you can waste a lot of time.”

Carolyn Silvestri, principal of The Personnel Perspective in Santa Rosa, suggests companies look even further into their culture and job position.

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nity to do more than just refill the position. We tell them to really look at their organizational structure and their future plans and goals, and determine what type of person will both fit their culture and have the skills necessary to support their long-term goals,” says Silvestri. “We advise them to use the situation as an opportunity to look at the whole organizational structure and ask, ‘What are

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we going to need in the future? What do we have right now? Can we make current employees' positions more interesting by moving some tasks around to let them grow? We tell them to look at the vacancy as an opportunity to modify the job to better support future growth or change. Take the time to look at the organizational structure and what they're going to need down the road. It's effective job design and ensures satisfaction for everyone."

Once you understand your company's culture and values, Silvestri says, identify the types of people who will be most successful in the organization. Over time, this process will get easier, because it will be clear what type of person succeeds.

During the interview process, advises Silvestri, use this knowledge to "take a look at the specific job and ask open-ended, situational questions. 'Here's the situation, how would you handle that?' It quickly becomes obvious from their response if they're someone whom you'll enjoy working with, who'll support your goals and blend nicely with your culture."

SIZING UP CANDIDATES

"When companies give me their job description—what I call their 'Christmas list'—I help them narrow it down to three hard skills and three soft skills, and we stick to that recipe," says Laxton. "We present them with people who match those skills. Hard skills might be knowledge of technology or financials. Soft skills might include someone who has a certain management style, who works well with business users, is really flexible or can wear a lot of hats and be diversified."

Paul Herrerias is the managing director of the San Francisco office of Stanton Chase (he also has a large office in Novato). He has 28 years of experience in the human resources field and previously had his own firm, Herrerias & Associates. Herrerias says there are four "career ingredients" critical to any hire: trust, credibility, experience and demographics.

"Employer and employee need to build a trusting relationship. Get to know each other personally—their circumstances, goals,

example, 'This candidate graduated from Yale University, was hired by IBM and later promoted to business unit manager for Intel Corporation.'"

The third element is experience. Herrerias says there are four stages of experience: functional skills, people and relationship skills, organizational skills or experience in a similar company environment (that is, whether it's an old or new firm, a family company, a comparable sized firm and the like) and experience within the industry.

"The fourth career ingredient is demographics," he continues. "Demographics are the specifics of time and place and money. Recognize that if any of them aren't right, it probably won't work out. 'Is this location workable for you, at this compensation level and with the time demands associated with it?' I cover all three of those things, and cut it off if it's not right. Don't tease yourself or get excited about somebody that's not going to fit. Don't shoehorn something together, because that's a bad hire, and it's going to come back to haunt you faster than you can imagine."

FIRST STOP: THE RÉSUMÉ

"We can weed out candidates fairly quickly through review of a résumé," says Silvestri. "However, we also think more 'out of the box' when reviewing a résumé, because we know people may not be skilled at résumé development. We'll often call people on the phone even if their résumé doesn't seem ideal, because we can pick up on things we feel might be important to the particular job, including skills that could be critical to the position we're recruiting for, which may have been developed in a different role."

A résumé can also alert you to potential problems. Laxton says to beware, for example, of a long history of consulting. "There's usually a reason people like to consult," she says. "They like the independence and the freedom and the ability to pick and choose their work. They don't have to be committed to the family. When you're a full-time employee, you ride the waves of the good times and bad times. Consultants can separate themselves from those peaks and

valleys. There might be a lot of internal strife going on in the organization, and the consultant can ignore it."

She likens job-hoppers to those who can't commit to a long-term relationship. "Unless it's just for a project, why would you want to consider bringing someone into your organization who's had 10 jobs in five years? There's definitely a pattern. There's a fear of commitment. It can't always be the company's fault. I say, be wary of those

folks. There's a place for them; they're good temps, but they should stay in the world of temping"

NEXT STEP: THE INTERVIEW

Craig Nelson is the executive vice president of staffing services for Nelson Staffing, a company his father started in 1970. "A common error is that people rely too much on the truth of the résumé. I think it's important to do a full interview. What we teach here is something called 'pattern interviewing.' Look for patterns in



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Cathy Bertrand, president of JobFinders, San Rafael

needs and values—so they can anticipate each other's behavior. They have to understand each other's value system. Doing so builds trust.

"Credibility is, 'Do you look the part? Have you hung out with the right sorts of people and been successful in this role?' If you're a CFO, do you belong to CFO organizations, do you network with CFOs, did you go to the same school as other CFOs, did you join the same organizations?' Those credibility factors also hint at trust. They help support your case for trusting this person and can be used to communicate that trust to others inside the company. For

people's lives. We try to figure out the 'will-do' factors—the basic traits—as opposed to the 'can-do' traits in someone's life. Can-do factors are 'I can type 50 words a minute.' Will-do factors are 'Is this a person of integrity? Is this someone who's going to go the extra mile to accomplish the goals they set for themselves? Is this a team player?' Those things are more important in the long run.

"For a really tough position, we go deep into the references—even ask a cited reference if we can talk to another person who worked with [the candidate], because you might get more information from that second person than the one that's listed as the reference. One of the things you can do is ask people if their former boss would be a reference. A lot of times that boss' input will give you a lot of information."

Things Nelson says can raise a red flag include evasiveness or giving an obviously untruthful reason why they left a previous job. "Integrity is a huge issue to me," says Nelson. "I would rather have someone say, 'I didn't get along with my boss on this job, but on these other three jobs that I had for five years each, I got along great with the bosses.' I'd rather hear that than someone sugarcoating it. You're always going to figure it out. So, to me, a big red flag is when someone is being dishonest, either on a résumé or during the interview."

Silvestri recommends a team approach to interviewing.

"Within the team, establish a system in which different people take care of different aspects of the interview. Ask open-ended questions, and each team member will have a slightly different interpretation of the answer, so you'll get a real feeling for whether the person has the attributes you're looking for."

All of the executives interviewed said they pre-screen applicants over the telephone.

"We spend a lot of time on the telephone, which saves time down the road," says Silvestri, who estimates her company has placed hundreds of hires over the course of 20 years in business. "Communication skills for any job are so critical that you can quickly weed people out that way. Often when you call people, their answering machine picks up, and you can tell a lot from that. Of course, we do personal interviews before we send anybody to meet a client so we can further evaluate how articulate they are and their presentation skills."

Her company offers training in good job interview techniques to companies. "Many of our clients say they're not good interviewers, so we'll facilitate the interview so they can sit back and observe. That way they don't have to be thinking about the next question and can really pay attention to how the candidate reacts to different questions. We also provide interview training for hiring managers as a part of our large training curriculum."

Herrerias reminds his clients that interviewing is a 50/50 proposition. "If you're doing more than 50 percent of the talking, you're doing a disservice to them and you," he says. "You need to be asking questions and listening. The only way you'll know about that person is by listening to them. You can also learn a lot about the candidate by the questions they ask; you learn what their priorities are and their level of understanding of the business and history. You want them to be asking questions about the business, the people and the job. If they're not asking, it doesn't always mean they're subservient, it might mean they don't know anything."

"Another thing is to explain up front in the interview what you want from this hire. What are your objectives? How will you measure success? What do you expect them to do? Talk about how they could achieve success as defined in the job description. When you're interviewing, make sure you're talking and listening and discussing how they could or should go about achieving the goals, both from the task and process side of your job and organization."

YOU'VE FOUND YOUR MATCH


You've defined your company culture and goals, searched and made a selection. Now what?

"I ask my clients, once they get started, to establish within their team a timely decision-making process, because good people are often being courted by other companies," says Silvestri. "The candidate pool is very competitive, and the good ones are receiving multiple offers. It's so sad when you present a great person to a client and, for whatever reason, they can't move quickly enough. That's frustrating for everyone."

Herrerias says he continues his client contact after the hire.

"I like to sit down with my client soon after they've hired the candidate and ask, 'OK, have you put together your plans and goals for the year yet?' I prefer them to have that in place before they hire, but at least by the time the decision is made. Some companies will take a month to settle in a new employee and then decide on their goals for that person for the year. It depends on the company, the culture and their level in the organization. If they're at a lower level, companies should have a clear understanding of what the goals are going to be two weeks before a hiring decision is made. It's called a job description."

With the right preparation and planning, careful résumé review, and in-depth interviewing techniques and goal setting, you'll be sure to hire the right person for your company.



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