

The right way to recruit

COACHING

Arm yourself with relevant background information about each interviewee

FEW would argue that companies are aware of the high cost of hiring the wrong person, or so you would think. Once the right person is hired, the emphasis is on keeping him.

The latest raft of research figures, which have been worryingly consistent over the past few years, seem to show some alarming gaps in acquisition and retention.

Last month's article looked at the tried and trusted interview process which still forms the backbone of the recruitment exercise.

Many years ago, the interview was it, plus a reference from a former employer based on the person's track record of achievement.

Unfortunately too many curricula vitae today have, shall we say, been enhanced to a level that you could be excused for thinking you had Einstein sitting in front of you. A candidate's curriculum vitae should provide

information to which you will add your own interviewer objectivity and subjectivity, and that will vary from person to person. However, this information only scratches the surface. You need to dig way beneath the surface and this is where science can help.

What every interviewer needs at an interview is:

- Impartial and objective information about a person's skills that are relevant to the job,
- A person's attributes or traits that can give a guide to his potential,
- What the person must do to meet the requirements of the job, and
- An independent measure so you can make informed decisions about a candidate's suitability.

Clearly such information will help you make the right decisions on whom to hire.

Being able to identify the gaps and what you need them to do is fundamental to

making informed decisions so that your human resources are not wasted, thus improving the top- and bottom-lines. The curriculum vitae may tell you some things about a candidate, but it also hides a myriad of information. You need to know whether a person can or cannot do a particular role or what investment in training and development will be required to help the person execute the role.

The most crucial element before you get anyone near an assessment is to be absolutely clear as to the skills and competency set which is required as they will form the backbone of the assessment. Equally be clear as to what you are measuring and whether the assessment is going to be an aid to making a decision, or will it make the decision for you. For existing staff, some assessments, such as the Myers Briggs and 16PF personality indicators, are

non-threatening while others signal a pass or fail set against your criteria. For example, there is a sales evaluation tool that will tell you, among 21 other competencies, who in the existing sales force will or will not sell, those who are or are not trainable, and at what level a sales person will stop selling because they think the price is too high. This tool's sister is a recruitment tool that will make a recommendation to hire or not hire based on your hiring criteria set against a self completed online questionnaire. To that will be questions supplied that you should ask at an interview only for those recommended for hire. The results for these are very accurate, 96 per cent, which provides insights an interview cannot uncover.

The assessments allow you to ask questions based on the results set against the candidates' stated experience and achievements. If companies

recognise that engaging buyers requires a high level of emotional attachment as various levels to the brand, then interviewers also need to recognise they are in the same boat with recruiting. Always ask about the tools' reliability, validity and normative data.

These assessments will also help the boss to understand how he engages with his team, thereby aiding retention and also providing

the type of work that people find stimulating and challenging. These tools can be put to good use when drawing up a training and development plan for existing staff, not to mention helping managers to get the right balance of skills and traits in their team.



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MENTORING



Q I read your first two articles and it encouraged me to write this letter. I have been in sales for about eight years and manage a sales team of 11 people. There are a few experienced members and most are new, and that is the purpose of this note to you. Retention is a problem and I know this affects a lot of companies. Can you help me with some ideas about recruiting sales people who will stay? I don't see myself as a bad manager as I would like to think I am an open and fair-minded person. I am trying to work out what I am doing wrong.

From Alvin in Bangkok

If acquisition and retention are handled well, companies will save many thousands or millions of dollars and promote substantial revenue growth – that is a proven fact.

Be sure you are clear on the following:

- your sales strategy
- how it fits with the marketing and business plans
- how you plan to grow existing business
- where you intend to get new business
- how you will grow your people

Ask yourself: "Why should anyone work for this company and me?" This question addresses an issue that will be in any candidate's mind and that is "what's in it for me". If you can answer that confidently you can think about interviewing – if not then don't.

Write down what you believe is the skills set the position requires. For example, many sales people are hired to sell new and existing business, and today there are few sales people who are good at, let alone comfortable, at

doing both. Never hire a general sales person, that is guaranteed to increase turnover.

Take a look at what buyers say they are looking for from your sales people. The bigger the account the greater the demand of the buyer, so if it is major account some of the qualities will be communication skills, primarily listening, negotiation ability, solution thinking etc. Equally do not waste time on recruiting a sales person for a position where discounting is heavy or worse rampant – you'll waste a valuable resource.

Beware of people who talk about their fantastic sales performance in the past. Too many sales people are recruited based on their figures alone, which raises this question – did they actually sell or was it just a good order taking time?

Ask questions at the interview that get the candidates to describe how they went about securing their sales in various situations, and what they like or don't like about selling. What were the obstacles, how did they ensure they spent their time productively and how did they handle rejection by a client.

Don't randomly allocate a sales person to an account. Match the buyer needs with the right sales person.

The recruitment of sales people and sales managers is not like hiring for just any position or vacancy that companies need to fill. Sales is one of the key roles within any company. Spend more time evaluating the skills set, where that person will fit in, match their skills set to the position to be filled, make sure you can meet their "what's in it for me" and once on board, develop them and grow them and that should help your retention.

Have a work-related issue or problem? Write to Ray (ray@think8.net).