

Hiring the Key Employee

By Bob Zahra

What's more disruptive and difficult than hiring a key employee? The temptation is to cut corners in the hiring process: to seriously consider the unqualified and the unhappy, to be "sold" an individual who's on the market rather than to bear down and expend precious time to identify, approach and secure the best possible candidate.

With a plate full of other problems, it's deceptively tempting for the hiring authority to "just fill the slot" and move on to the next problem—even though it's clear that the properly positioned key employee is the foundation upon which the successful company is built. The most successful business decisions are made in the context of the furthest timeline. An easy, but marginal, hire today may necessitate a termination and re-hire when least tolerable.



The company rises on the shoulders of the key employee. It only makes sense to select that key employee carefully. It's a mistake to be "sold" an individual, either by the candidate or by the candidate's advocate. The individual's proven history is available, both in terms of work history and character. Although increasingly more difficult legally to ascertain, degrees can be verified. Criminal records, driving records and sexual offender profiles all can be checked.

Instead of doing the hard work of approaching directly the individual who's truly qualified, who can improve their own family's circumstances plus bring decades of significant strategic value to the hiring company, the easy way out is to hire someone who's available, with whom you have "good chemistry"—even though the truth is (and always has been) that you'll learn to "like" the person who delivers for you in superior fashion, while "good chemistry" fizzles in the face of non-performance.

Our industry is a small town internationally. There are few people who have the proven, demonstrated qualifications required. Everybody knows everybody. The real challenge isn't identification of the candidate; it's shepherding the understandably cautious candidate from first contact through family reluctance, confidentiality concerns, cold feet, multiple interviews, background investigation, negotiations relative to offer, counter-offer from current employer, relocation hurdles, family adjustment, and on and on.

Cast a cold eye on personal chemistry. Give more credence to proven history. Don't be "sold" whomever is available. Select the person who can best contribute to the long-term success of your company. ⑤

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