Hiring “The Right People”

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One of the most cost-effective ways employers can get the most from their available resources is by increasing their effectiveness in the selection of their key employees. Much research shows that hiring the “right people” is a critical determinant of an organization’s success. Unfortunately, although hiring authorities usually are technically astute in their own disciplines, they often lack the knowledge and skills necessary to make effective hiring decisions. They often make uninformed decisions resulting in resignations and terminations, reduced productivity and morale, and wasted time and money. Having had many opportunities to help a range of organizations to improve their, “strategic selection” processes, I’ve identified some of their more common and ineffective practices, which I call the “Dirty Dozen: The 12 Deadly Sins Of Hiring”:

1. The employer sells the job to the candidate. The employer emphasizes the positive aspects of the job to prospects and presents it as, “This is the greatest job you’ve ever seen.” Then, after the person begins the job, he or she discovers that the job’s not what was expected.

2. The candidate sells himself/herself to the employer. Candidates are now much more sophisticated interviewees. They even have books that describe how to answer specific questions telling the applicant to say what the employer wants to hear, instead of what’s most important to the person. Plus, candidates frequently misrepresent their skills, knowledge, and professional interests to make it seem that they love to do everything the job requires.

3. Employers “paper match” resumes and job descriptions. Too much emphasis is placed on what the person can do, not what he/she will do in a particular position. And, as seasoned managers know, people don’t change themselves to fit their jobs; rather, they change their jobs around to suit their preferences.

4. There is an over-reliance on generic job descriptions. Job descriptions are misnomers. They don’t differentiate the unique needs of similarly titled jobs within or across different organizations. The most accurate item in them is one saying that the employee “completes all other duties as assigned.”

5. Resumes are deceptive. Often professionally prepared, they make the person appear qualified to do everything from typing 100 words/minute to neurosurgery.

6. Hiring decisions are made at the gut level. Studies show that final hiring decisions are often not based on any real objective data. Rather, people tend to rely on their gut instincts in evaluating prospective candidates.

7. Hiring decisions are made on first (and lasting) impressions. Employers commonly make decisions about the person “right off the bat,” and it’s hard, if not impossible, for the candidate to change these impressions once they’re established.

8. Hiring decisions are often made in the first few minutes of the interview. After the first three or four minutes of the interview, the manager spends the remaining 56 minutes trying to gather evidence to support the decision he or she has already made. It’s similar to the psychological process you go
through in making a major purchase, such as a car or a house. After you make the decision, you want to minimize any anxiety, stress, or cognitive dissonance you might have about it. You want to be confident that you made the right decision, so you immediately start to find justifications for doing what you did.

9. We tend to hire people that we like. Certainly, a manager should hire someone with whom he or she can work. But just because someone is personable doesn’t mean that the person is appropriate for the job! This becomes quite apparent when this “likable” person begins to behave in unexpected and undesirable ways to the chagrin of the supervisor.

10. We tend to hire people like ourselves. The facts show that we tend to hire people who share things in common with us, such as similar experience, education, and interests. But it’s important to be careful not to hire people like oneself if that’s not what the position requires.

11. We tend to “hang hats” on people. We attribute certain characteristics not based in reality to people who remind us, positively or negatively, of others whom we already know and to whom we then react accordingly.

12. We may suffer from the “warm-body-will-suffice” syndrome. Managers are often “under the gun” to fill a position, creating pressure to hire the first available person with the minimum credentials and within the salary range. A frequent consequence of “quick hires” is a mutually unsatisfactory relationship between the employer and employee. The result of these deadly sins is that the wrong person is hired and creates unexpected problems for the organization. Valued, longtime employees quit or complain because of this person; morale and productivity suffer; and now the organization is worse off than before the person was hired. This person quits or gets fired, and everyone stands around watching the person go out the front door for the last time, scratching their heads, wondering “Gee, why did they leave? They were so well qualified!”

In summary, traditional interviews are of limited value and benefit no one. Prospective employers and employees share much in common: they don’t know what they want; they don’t know how to determine if they are “right” for each other; and they can vividly recall previous horror stories that benefited neither the employer nor the employee. Fortunately, innovative, cost effective methods exist to help employers hire the “right” people. A unique process that identifies and systematically matches the most critical characteristics of both the employer and employee has proven to be quite beneficial over the long term. This will become a more integral part of progressive organizations’ hiring practices as they are challenged to do more with less.

Kenneth R. Cohen, Ph.D.,
President,
The Synergy Organization