



FEARFUL HIRING - PART I

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THE RISK

Hiring anyone is a risk. It's a big risk because no matter how often we do it, and how good we are at it, there is always a risk of not finding a person who works out. Hiring is a reflection of our business acumen. We are judged by who we hire and how successful they are. The company's future depends on our hiring decisions.

Our experience in the everyday placement and recruitment business shows us that most people try to take the risk out of hiring by being too careful. It might be more appropriate to say that we see organizations being too careful about the wrong things in the interviewing and hiring process. They try to be so careful in not making a mistake, that not making a mistake becomes more important than finding the best candidate for the job. Vision of gain means taking risks. Any hiring practice that is based on the fear of not making a mistake usually results in a safe hire but one that rarely makes an excellent employee or real leader. The hiring process focuses more on the "why nots?" than the "whys?" Safe candidates get hired and more often than not are no better than average employees.

BEING TOO CAREFUL

The mistake of being too careful reveals itself through certain signs within the search process. The first is that the criteria for the position are ridiculously heavy. Restrictions on the requirements, narrow requirements, and requirements that are far beyond necessary to do the job, are set out as ideal. The requirements become so stringent that only a perfect candidate could fit them. There are no perfect people so therefore



no perfect candidates. Overkill is a good way to describe it. The key here is to set reasonable criteria based on the function of the job, not someone's intellectual wish list. Those wish lists could insure not making a mistake if . . . if a person that fits all of them could be found. Be reasonable about criteria and requirements. Make a list of musts in functions and previous experience. Try and set out to measure quality of experience rather than quantity. Keep it simple. Be reasonable.

A COMMITTEE?

Another indication of being too careful is the institution of a hiring committee. You know what a camel is? . . . It's a horse gone to committee. Other than the highest levels of positions in a company, ones that report to boards, a hiring committee will inevitably hire mediocrity. The nature of a committee is to get consensus. Consensus in hiring means not so much hiring someone that everyone likes and thinks can do the job, but hiring someone whom everyone doesn't dislike or whom everyone dislikes the least. The lesser of all evils usually gets the job. Involving more than three decisions in the hiring process will tend to create a committee effect. The game then becomes to find a candidate who can pass the test of the committee rather than the best candidate for the job. Keeping everyone satisfied becomes more important than filling the job with the right person.

KNEE JERK REACTIONS

A third sign of being too careful is having a knee jerk reaction to whatever qualities the last failed, fired or resigned employee did or didn't have. Often when employers have a bad



experience with an employee, whatever obvious attributes, failings, or conditions that employee had will become overriding issues in future candidates to be considered. For instance, we recently had an employer tell us that he didn't want any candidates except those originally from Texas. The employee who was leaving, thus creating the opening, was from Ohio. His father had died and he was moving back to Ohio to be closer to his surviving family. We greatly appreciate this employer's frustration, but being from Ohio or Texas has nothing to do with either candidate being qualified, or for that matter, why he would eventually stay or go. There is a human tendency to overreact to whatever last burned us. We have heard requests to interview people who were married . . . because the last one wasn't, non-degreed . . . because the last one was, short . . . because the last one was tall (. . . really true!), and someone who was on their last job only a short period of time . . . because the last person had held a single 10-year job before they had been hired. People sometimes overreact to one single issue and tend to think that reason is the only reason the last employee didn't work out. Single issue interviewing or hiring is just not reasonable, especially if the issue has no relation to the job function. The lesson is not to overreact to any aspect of the employee who is leaving. We should learn from our mistakes but not overreact to them.