

TAKING CONTROL **WHEN THERE'S A CANDIDATE SHORTAGE**

With respect to the state of the national economy, this is one of the craziest times I've experienced in the past ten years: While some industries are laying off due to economic misfortunes and misguided optimism, others are hiring like crazy, offering hiring bonuses just to find the candidate of choice!

Hiring practices have almost become games of chance. Unless a company is extremely careful, a mishire could occur, resulting in high turnover costs in addition to wasted recruitment dollars. Multiply this equation by ten and you get my dire point. Those employees who once were considered marginal in performance are now viewed as "not so bad" and those who once were considered "stars" are now "super stars".

So what changed? Desperation set in. With such a severe candidate shortage in certain market niches and company deadlines still needing to be met, hiring managers have swung from being realists to being opportunists. Rationalization now takes place where thoughtful, selective candidate review used to reign.

I'm not saying hiring managers aren't doing a good job, given the circumstances they're up against. What I am saying is that maybe now is the time to get a temporary employee or to offer the unthinkable, overtime pay, to those who can get the job done, freeing up needed time to make a good hiring decision. So you may have to spend a few more dollars than you originally anticipated when you put together your hiring budget. So what? You're going to lose all that money anyway in a corporate crapshoot by hiring and firing a bad employee. Does the saying, "Back to square one" ring a bell?

I once heard a smart businessman say, “Give me someone with the ‘want’; I can always teach the ‘how’”. This man knows business! Yet I consistently hear hiring managers say that they want someone who can step into the job and take off running on Day 1. Are you out of your mind? What about providing support and patience to this person instead of expecting the world out of him or her? What about giving the individual the necessary tools that even Einstein would need when stepping into a new role. Well, maybe not Einstein...but you get my point.

Smart candidates have become smart interviewees. Smart interviewees have become selective, because they know, for the most part, that they have leverage in this marketplace. They understand the hiring game, and they’re not about to waste their precious time with you if you aren’t serious and if you aren’t competitive. They want flexibility, and most importantly, they want to matter to their bosses.

Think about this: Isn’t this what we all want when we’re looking for work, regardless of the economy? You bet it is. Can we expect this? Probably not, but those companies that put people over profits will always win out. Good people always bring in lots of profit.

If I were a hiring manager right now, you know what I’d be doing? I’d be revising my interviewing questions to tap into a candidate’s motivations and long-term interests. I’d be asking about what time of the day he or she peaks with regard to work performance and what the individual does when work slows down? I’d want to know, “Why my company”, especially if the candidate is comparing two or three potential offers. Believe me, you’ll uncover hidden expectations by asking this zinger question.

I'd then be verifying all of my perceptions with selection assessments and cross interviewing as much as possible.

What I wouldn't be doing is trying to select between two mediocre candidates and then try to justify why I should hire one of them. I'd also not assume that every candidate I interview is dying to work for my wonderful company, nor would I convince anyone to take my job offering because it feels right to only me. I'd be eying my candidate of choice for unspoken hesitations or cautiousness and address the behaviors. If something doesn't feel right or you think you may not be on target, ask for more clarification. If you still don't get it from the candidate, move on. If it's that hard to get a straight answer out of someone who supposedly wants to work for you, think of the bleak future that may lie ahead for the two of you if you actually hook up!

So, that's my story and I'm sticking to it. Hiring managers take note: Good candidates abound. With time, persistence and a systematic approach, even the unreachable "star" employee can be within your grasp. Just don't make excuses for bad hires or take all the credit for good ones. Give as much as you can without giving away the house and always understand that in due course the pendulum will swing again. Soon you may be pulling out your hair once again, combing through all those hot resumes. Isn't that a delightful fantasy!

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