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Guide to Staffing and Recruitment- *for Hiring Managers and Employers*

Identifying and Hiring top talent can prove to be a major challenge to any company. The information that follows provides a number of tools and information to help you successfully navigate the hiring process.

Even with unemployment at record numbers, having a recruiting strategy in place is critical. Our goal at **Edward Lewis Associates** is to serve as a resource on staffing issues and provide proven methods that can take some of the guess work out of the hiring process.

Throughout this “guide” you will tips on everything from locating good candidates, assessing resumes, conducting reference checks and providing an employee friendly workplace.

Assessing Your Staffing Needs

In order for the hiring process to be effective, a **hiring manager must lay down some groundwork**. As work piles up, it’s tempting to put the planning process aside in favor of simply filling a position.

It can be difficult to hire the right person if you haven’t defined the specific combination of skills, experience and knowledge. You’re not just trying to “fill” a job: you’re seeking an individual who can add value, enhance your bottom line and fulfill the objectives of your company. By simply hiring to close a vacancy rather than strategically satisfy the needs and requirements of your company or department, you run the risk of selecting the wrong individual. To avoid a potential costly mistake, consider some of the following:

-Forecast Your Workload

This is the key to a strategic approach to staffing a position. Based on current activity levels and foreseeable business conditions, what do you anticipate your firm’s/department workload to be? This step is crucial in determining which type of employee is required-Full-time, Part-Time, or Temporary...or whether you need to hire someone at all.

-Evaluate Current Personnel Resources

What key skills are currently on staff and which you are lacking? Are your employees’ talents being fully utilized, or is there room to promote from within?

-Create a Job Description

This should be a brief but important document that provides a picture (blueprint) of the position and serves as a basis for hiring criteria. A well-written job description should include the following:

Title- Explains the type of professional you’re looking to hire (i.e., Controller, Senior Accountant, Internal Auditor, Payroll Clerk, etc.)

Primary responsibilities- Outlines the main duties of the position.

Secondary responsibilities- Describes periodic, rather than daily duties, (i.e.-“train new staff”)

Core Competencies- Highlights the skills and attributes required to perform the job.

Experience Required- Specific type and amount of experience. For example, does the candidate need to be familiar with your industry or need to have a number of years in a specific field.

Preferred Education/Background- Degrees, certifications and any other credentials. Be careful not to turn this item into a “deal-breaker” later in the hiring process. Credentials can be a useful screening device, but their absence should not prevent you from hiring an otherwise qualified, experience prospect.

By ensuring you’re on the right track in terms of skills and talent you’re seeking before beginning the hiring process, you increase your chances of finding the best talent.

Attracting Top Talent

The most talented candidates are always in high demand. It can take effort and planning to persuade top applicants to accept a job with your firm.

Consider how you present job opportunities to candidates. If you find that you’re losing top candidates to other offers, try to determine why. Here are some issues to consider:

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-Are you really Selling the Position? You should be highlighting specific benefits and perks of your position. One approach would be to have prospective employees meet with staff members who can offer an insider’s perspective on things like growth opportunities, work environment and management style.

-Is the Compensation Package Competitive? It’s always better to offer a salary slightly higher than that of your competition. You can research salary ranges through a number of sources; salary.com, other job listings, recruiters, professional associations.

-How attractive is Your corporate culture? Several companies have programs in place designed to create a more supportive atmosphere. Simple practices such as an open door management policy and frequent praise and staff recognition of staff can make a significant difference.

Are you being decisive enough? Careful hiring is critical, but don’t be overly cautious when making a decision on Top candidates. It’s easy to lose an individual’s interest if you delay making an offer.

Are you Pursuing References Promptly and Aggressively? A drawn out reference checking process can often send a negative message to an enthusiastic candidate. If you’re having

trouble receiving reference responses, let the candidate know and solicit help with their contacts.

By analyzing each step of your staffing process and making improvements where necessary, you increase your chances of identifying and attracting top talent.

Getting the Most out of Interviewing

The importance of the actual interview is stressed extensively to the job seeker-but this meeting is equally as important to employers. It is certainly one of your most valuable hiring tools and you should rigorously prepare as a job seeker would.

The first step is to develop a thorough job description for the positions you are seeking to fill. This will undoubtedly help focus your search and identify the right Questions to ask.

Schedule interviews during the least busy portion of the day so you can have time getting to know the person you are meeting with. If an applicant is employed an off hour time may have to be scheduled.

The following sections include “tips” on how to **Evaluate Resumes** and the **Types of Questions** you should be asking.

Evaluating Resumes

With a little preparation and a discerning eye, **you can reduce the time you spend scanning resumes** and ensure you schedule interviews with only highly skilled legal professionals. Following are some tips for your preparation:

Define Requirements

Have a detailed job description on hand before you begin. It should focus on skills and expertise that will truly have an impact on job performance. Requirements such as practice-area expertise, software knowledge and years of experience, among other qualifications, should all be included. As you sort resumes, the job description will help you narrow the field.

Review Styles

Resumes typically fall into two categories, chronological or functional, and it's important to know what to look for in each type. The classic resume is organized chronologically, with most recent work experience listed first. Job responsibilities are then described after each position listed. An alternative is the functional resume, wherein information is organized according to individual skills, with experience and abilities most relevant to a given position listed first.

When reviewing a chronological resume, pay close attention to dates of employment and gaps in work history. For example, a resume that states a position was held in "2008" does not clearly indicate the length of employment. The job could have lasted from one day to 6 months. With functional resumes, be on guard for vague job descriptions or failure to list actual positions held. This can indicate that the job seeker hasn't acquired significant work experience.

Read Between the Lines

A resume should be well written and free of any typos, misspellings and grammatical errors.

Candidates who take the time to produce a clean and professional resume demonstrate attention to detail and a desire to make a favorable impression. Also be wary of such vague phrases as "exposure to," "familiar with" and other qualifiers. These often indicate the candidate lacks hands-on experience. And read each entry from the bottom up; job candidates frequently list their least flattering information last.

Follow Up With Phone Calls

Even after carefully reviewing resumes, you may still have doubts about which candidates are suitable for in-person interviews. Consider conducting a brief telephone interview to narrow the field. This additional step can save you valuable time – an unproductive phone interview may take five minutes but an unnecessary formal interview could cost an hour or more of your day. Skillfully reviewing resumes requires a thoughtful yet flexible approach. With a little practice, you can read resumes for what they say – and do not say – about job candidates, which in turn will help you make a more effective hiring decision.

When the screening of the candidates is done, you will bring the top two or three in for an interview. What questions should you ask them? What answers should you be looking for? How will you know which one to hire? Whether you work for a large company with a Human Resources department and volumes of procedures or are a small business owner with a few employees, the types of questions you want to ask are the same.

Types of Questions to Ask

You want to ask the kind of questions that, in increasing order of importance, tell you 1) whether the person has the skills to do the job, 2) how they function under pressure, and 3) how well they will fit into the team

Can They Do the Job?

These should be fairly simple questions to ask. You've reviewed the candidates' resume so you know they are at least claiming to have the requisite skill sets for this position. Ask a few questions to verify what they claim.

"I see you managed the Treasury function for two divisions. What was the most difficult part of working with them?"

"When you were the Controller for ABC company what were the steps you took when planning the annual budget?"

"I see you can do Macros in excel. How would you link a table into a?"

These types of questions ask how or what. They can't be answered yes or no. Listen to the answer to see how quickly they answer, how complete/correct their answer is, and whether they actually answer what you asked or go off to something with which they are more familiar.

How Well Do They Function Under Pressure

This may be the area where most managers have trouble asking good questions, but they are more important than the job competency questions above. We are reluctant to be the "bad guy", to put someone under pressure. However, there are very few jobs, and certainly none that report to you, that don't place the employee under stress from time to time. Anybody can do well in calm times. You want people who can function well when things get confusing or difficult. To identify which candidate will perform best under pressure, ask tough, stressful questions.

"What makes you think you are better for this job than all the other candidates?"

"Tell me about a stressful situation that occurred repeatedly on your last job and how you handled it."

"Which co-worker at your last job did you get along with least well? What did you do about it?"

The important thing here is how quickly, directly, and completely they answer your questions. If a candidate says he has never been under stress, avoid that person. Either they are not truthful or out of touch with reality. If a candidate says she get along with all her co-workers and never has a conflict with anyone, press for more information. She is either a saint or a doormat. One question I like to ask here is "What did you think of our website?" I tells me whether the person has taken the time to visit our website to learn about the company, but it also tells me how they will respond to the pressure of being put on the spot.

How Well Will They Fit In

Among equally qualified candidates, this is the most important attribute. You need someone who will fit with the team and be a productive member, someone who will add to the team and not be a distraction. Be careful, though. You aren't looking for the "nicest" person. You are looking for the best fit. In addition to personality, you need to evaluate work habits, a complementary skill set, and where the team needs help.

In a very low key office, a loud, boisterous new hire would probably decrease the team's production, because the team would be so busy staring at the new comer and quietly discussing among themselves why the person is so loud. On the other hand, someone moderately outspoken could be just what the team needs to get them fired up and producing again at top levels.

If everyone in the group comes in between 8:30 and 9, but works until 6 PM or later, it will be difficult for a new hire to fit in if they always come in at 6:30 or 7 so they can leave at 3.

Further Insight

To obtain additional insight into a candidates character or their overall view of the industry, consider asking the following:

What is your Opinion on the role of technology in the accounting industry today?

What do you think your current/past company can do to be more successful?

While you're not looking for proprietary or specific information, you are looking for someone that has a clear understanding of their company's goals and an understanding of their objectives. An inability to articulate a solid answer should give pause as to whether or not this person would have that same lack of interest to carry to you organization.

Reference Checking

It can be tempting to rush through the reference checking process-or bypass it all together, in order to make a quick hire. While it's important not to delay this step and risk losing a potential candidate, the reference checking process is still a critical tool for evaluating prospective employees. Quite often many firms have legal issues that will provide little more than dates of employment, title and salary. With a little preparation and persistence, it is possible to glean some valuable insight during this process.

Getting Started

Let candidates know early in the interview process that should they become a finalist, you will be conducting a thorough reference check. This enables applicants to be lining up references and notifying them that they will be receiving a call. During the interview process, make note of individual responses.

-Make it a Do-it-Yourself Project

Handle the reference checking process yourself. You know better than anyone else which skills, personality and other intangibles will work best. Additionally, by speaking with a candidates' former employers who most likely are your counterparts, you're more likely to develop a rapport which in turn can result in obtaining more useful information.

-What Types of Questions do I Ask?

- When did he/she work for your company? Could you confirm starting and ending employment dates? When did he/she leave the company?
- Why did they leave the company?
- What was his/her compensation/salary?
- Can you describe the job responsibilities?
- Could I briefly review the resume? Do the specifics match?
- How did they handle conflict? How about pressure? Stress?
- Did you evaluate performance? Can you speak to his/her strong and weak points? What was noted as needing improvement during this performance review?
- What was his/her biggest accomplishment while working for your company?
- Would you rehire this person if the opportunity arose?
- If I describe the position we are hiring for to you, could you describe how good a fit you think (name) would be for the position?
- Could I briefly review the resume? Do the specifics match?
- Did he/she miss an unusual amount of work? Lateness?
- Did he/she get along well with management and co-workers?
- Did he/she supervise other employees? How effectively?
- Can you describe this person's experience working as a member of a team?
- Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to share with me?

-Background Checks

It's estimated that over 40% of resumes can contain false or tweaked information. In order to insure what has been promised you may want to obtain a third-party background check. For example, you may want to find out whether you actually graduated from the college you said you did or to confirm that you worked at your previous employer(s) during the time stated on your resume or your job application.

What's included in an employee background check? **The Fair Credit Reporting Act** (FCRA) sets the standards for screening for employment. The FCRA defines a background check as a consumer report. Before an employer can get a consumer report or run a **credit check** for employment purposes, they must notify you in writing and get your written authorization.

Creating an Employee Friendly Work-Place

-Encourage staff to participate in developing solutions for enhancing your company's work environment. Solicit feedback from employees by periodically conducting anonymous satisfaction surveys. Ask not only for improvements they would like to see but practical ways of implementing these suggestions

-Publicize Your Programs:

Accentuate those aspects of your business that most appeal to job candidates. Look for areas in which your company excels and emphasize them when you interview applicants. For example, if your firm is small, you may have more flexibility than larger companies when it comes to offering nontraditional benefits, relaxed business attire or a faster track to career advancement.

-Help Employees Balance Obligations:

Promote management practices and personnel policies that allow for personal days when necessary, and provide services on premises that save employees time.

-Empower Employees:

Most people work harder and do a better job if they feel their opinions are valued, they are trusted to be responsible, and they are empowered to make their own decisions.

-Hire for the Long Term:

The way a company hires, trains and rewards employees reveals a great deal about its values. Hiring for aptitude and then training for career advancement goes a long way toward building loyalty and increasing retention rates.

Companies with worker-friendly management practices are at a distinct advantage when it comes to hiring qualified talent. These programs help create a productive, satisfying workplace where employee turnover, as well as recruitment and training costs, are kept to a minimum.

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