

■ MID-IOWA BUSINESS

A critical decision: Who to hire?

Few management decisions carry as much impact as deciding who to hire. Hiring the right person results in a daily affirmation of your wise choice. A poor hire, on the other hand, requires an inordinate amount of attention and may eventually call for an unpleasant termination.

The hiring challenge is complicated by the fact most candidates are on their absolute best behavior and so many true identities are well-hidden behind an interview façade. Nonetheless, there are time-tested techniques which greatly improve the odds of making a sound decision.

First of all, employing a team approach increases the likelihood of a quality decision. A team also tends to negate the potential for the decision being overly influenced by a sole interviewer's halo effect which is a positive bias resulting from a single trait. For example, an interviewer's assessment is positively biased toward the candidate because they attended the same school, belonged to the same sorority, were both Eagle Scouts, etc. If your organization is very small or you can't involve co-workers in the hiring decision for whatever reason, form a small interview team of trusted colleagues from outside your business that understands your organization.

Gather the team together a couple of days prior to the interview to develop a game plan. Each interviewer should be assigned a couple of designated focus areas and encouraged to develop open-ended, thought-provoking questions which allow them to deeply evaluate the candidate in those areas.



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What's the source of these focus areas? They should be a direct reflection of your organization's core values. Hiring new

employees and evaluating current ones are the two primary activities for bringing core values to life. If core values are not key criteria in your hiring and evaluation processes, there's a good chance that they are likely little more than ambiguous concepts framed on the wall.

Below are some interview techniques to consider:

I like to lead off with a question regarding the three things the candidate values most. Their answer generally indicates how open and honest they are and therefore, how much I can trust them during the remainder of the interview. It's my calibration question.

When time management skills are critical to the job, I've had great success with handing the candidate a list of 10 questions and asking them to lead the conversation. If they're still responding to the first question 20 minutes into a scheduled 45-minute interview, they're not the right person.

If attention to detail is important or your organization values cleanliness and orderliness, have someone discretely check out the candidate's car (assuming they drove their own) for those qualities.

Scheduling lunch with the can-

didate's potential peers works well. The informal atmosphere often leads to the candidate letting their guard down and responding more honestly to questions.

Steal a trick from the TV detective Columbo and ask an important question as if it's an afterthought while wrapping up. Again, this may lead to a less rehearsed answer.

An interview report out meeting with the team should be scheduled on the same day as the interview so that it's still fresh in everyone's mind. Avoid group think by asking each team member to come to the meeting with their recommendation on the candidate. A fun way to quickly assess responses is to have interviewers bounce their fist into their hand two times (a la paper-rock-scissors) and then cast their vote with a thumbs-up, down or sideways.

Any negative or neutral votes should be judiciously explored via discussion. Reaching team consensus prior to discounting any highlighted concerns is warranted before proceeding with an offer. This is because the interview setting may likely be the best you will ever see the candidate again. Countless managers have later lamented that an employee's now glaring weakness was identified as a yellow light during the interview but rationalized away.

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