

Hiring: 7 PRE-HIRE Steps

After many years of doing more work with fewer people, the budget allows for hiring a new employee. You want to make the most of this hire. So where to start?

The old saying “people don’t plan to fail; they fail to plan” provides a good analogy here. Spending the time now to make a careful plan, which defines the duties and responsibilities of the new job before even advertising the job, will save time, money, and problems down the road.

Let’s look at an example: in a small law firm, originally, there were four attorneys, two legal assistants, one bookkeeper, and one receptionist. During the economic downturn, the receptionist position was eliminated and the phones were answered and clients greeted by the other three staff people, who took turns. Now, a “receptionist” position is to be hired. In a rushed situation, the hiring manager advertises for a “receptionist,” interviews and hires a qualified person. On her first day, what is she supposed to do? Just answer phones and greet clients? Too much downtime. Maybe add typing, maybe add filing, maybe add open mail, maybe add other tasks as you go. Yet, if the position she was hired for is “receptionist”—traditionally, if not otherwise defined, answer phones and greet clients, then she may not have the right skills, she may have a disability that prevents performance of a task that was not identified at hire but is added later, and the new hire may feel additional duties are being “added” to her job and/or other employees may feel their duties are being “taken away.” In this situation, the firm has not made the most of this new hire. What steps could have been taken to avoid some of these (and other) potential issues?

Step 1: GATHER information. Talk to your current employees and managers. Specifically identify (1) the tasks the current employees are already performing; (2) those that are not getting done because of lack of time or expertise or other reasons; (3) the tasks your current employees want to keep; (4) those they want to pass on to the new hire; and (5) additional tasks that have been on the back burner that could be handled by the new hire, i.e. website updates, filing system upgrade/redesign, software applications/improvements, marketing, use of internet to increase business, etc.

Step 2: WRITE OUT (1) the specific duties, responsibilities, and tasks this job will perform, (2) the qualifications/skills necessary for their performance, (3) the work hours, i.e. start and end time and/or flex time, (4) the work location/station, i.e. office/cubicle, equipment needed, (5) any physical requirements needed to perform the job, (6) the appropriate job title, and (7) the job’s anticipated compensation/benefits package. If you cannot be specific, return to Step 1 to gather clarifying information and more details.

Step 3: ADVERTISE for the job you defined. If you want someone to answer phones, type documents, maintain the website, prepare excel spreadsheets (and show others how to use them), you’re not going to advertise for a “receptionist”—you’ll need a different title because you need a different type of candidate. Investigate other job postings to identify job titles other companies use for the type of job you’re looking to fill. Be creative—this is your opportunity to define the job.

Step 4: WRITE OUT interview questions that parallel the job you defined in Step 2 and assist you in determining whether the candidate possesses the qualifications/skills that will be necessary for the performance of the job. This step is also important to prevent disability discrimination issues because the employer avoids potential violation of anti-discrimination laws if it can show that the performance of a particular duty is an essential function of the job and the employee's disability prevented him/her from performance of that duty. (So you see why it's important to determine the duties, responsibilities and tasks of the job, which are the "essential functions" of the job before—rather than after—the employee is hired.)

Step 5: SELECT candidates for interview by comparing their resumes to the list of job requirements defined in Step 2. Keep notes for each candidate regarding the reason(s) the person was selected or not selected for interview.

Step 6: INTERVIEW candidates using the questions prepared in Step 4 and keep notes of the candidate's response to each question. If multiple interviewers are involved, everyone follows the script—no adlibbing/improvising. If follow up questions are desired, they can be prepared later and asked at the second interview.

Step 7: CONSULT with 1-2 other managers about each of the candidate's qualifications, strengths and weaknesses, and potential for success in the job. Document the reasons for choosing one candidate over the others.

NOW, you're ready to make the job offer. See article Hiring: 5 MAKING THE OFFER Steps

While these steps may seem like a lot of work, the investment made in the planning stage—before the job offer is ever extended—will prevent many potential issues from arising after the new employee is hired.

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