

How to Avoid Bad Hires

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Sometimes you hire the wrong person. It happens. Maybe they aren't as qualified as they claimed, and you're forced to give them extra training or let them go. Maybe they seemed like a great fit, but [quit shortly after starting](#). Maybe the employee's work is fine, all things considered, but you can't help but wonder whether you should have chosen a different candidate.

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The Job Posting

The goal of a job posting isn't to attract as many people as possible—not unless anyone could do the job. Effective job postings encourage applications from qualified job seekers while discouraging applications from individuals who either wouldn't be able to do the job or perform at the level you need. The best postings are engaging, informative, and clear. They build excitement among quality candidates and provide people with reasons to self-select out of the jobs that aren't right for them.

When drafting the job posting, you have to know what you're looking for. Describe the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do the job as accurately and precisely as you

can. Start with what's most important. Readers should be able to tell right away whether they're qualified and capable of being successful in the role.

Use language they're likely to understand and that will help them envision themselves in the role. Be concrete, but concise. Technical jargon and acronyms might be fine if they're well known in the field, but avoid terms that are more particular to your organization or that may have different meanings to different audiences. Be careful with abstract descriptors like "fast-paced environment," "deadline-driven," "long hours," or "work hard play hard." A fast-paced work environment, for instance, could mean projects get done quickly and efficiently, but it could also mean that people feel rushed to get their regular jobs done because they're constantly putting out fires. If you're not sure how to describe the work or work environment, ask employees what terms they'd use and what those descriptions look like in practice.

The Interview

As with the job posting, the interview process is an opportunity to build excitement for the role, but also to eliminate candidates who looked qualified on paper but don't truly possess the capabilities to do the job to your satisfaction.

Challenge candidates to convince you that they would be successful in the role. Ask them how they used relevant knowledge and skills in the past and what the outcome was. What did their successes look like? What about their failures? If their answers are vague or elusive, ask for specifics. You don't need to be confrontational, but you should be direct. Remember, you're collecting information you'll use to assess their fitness for the role and compare them to other candidates. Details matter, so take good notes.

When explaining the work the candidate would do or answering questions they have, be upfront about the challenges that come with the job. Don't downplay the downsides to the point of deception. The person you hire will not appreciate being misled about the position, and if hired they'd likely be more engaged in finding another job than doing the one you hired them to do.

If you have a team of interviewers, talk with them as a group before beginning interviews so they know what you are looking for in a successful candidate, what to prioritize, and where each should focus their questions. After the interviews are complete, meet again as a group to go over everyone's notes and share feedback about each candidate. Encourage open communication and honest opinions, especially with respect to concerns about skills and abilities. Keep an eye out for discrepancies. This is the time to question everyone's impressions of each candidate, not go with the flow.

Making Your Decision

If one exceptional candidate clearly stands apart from the others, you probably have an easy decision to make. Make the offer, high five the team, and call it a day. However, your decision might not be so easy. Let's look at two common reasons.

First, you might not have any candidate who can do the job. If that's the case, you'll need to decide whether to cast another net (starting the process over again), or adapt the job itself to the candidate who showed the most potential. For the former, it might help to tweak the job posting, screening process, and interview questions—especially if unqualified applicants are making it to the interview stage. For the latter, you may need to rethink the essential functions of the job and how the duties could be performed by someone that doesn't fit your ideal qualifications.

The second and preferable possibility is that you have multiple standout candidates and none of them seems the obvious choice. If that's the case, rank each qualified candidate based on the following criteria:

- The necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for the role
- Alignment with the company's values and culture
- Likelihood to thrive within the organization and not just "fit in"
- Opportunity to contribute something new (e.g., expertise, a skill set, connections) to the organization
- Room, direction, and support to grow within the organization
- Job fit with what the candidate is looking for
- Satisfaction with compensation

Your goal with these rankings is to identify the candidate who is most likely to be successful in the role and contribute to the success of the organization. This might not be the "most qualified" candidate. It would be risky, for example, to offer a job to someone who's likely to be a stellar performer but will leave the moment a better-paying alternative pops up.

By spending some extra time on your job posting, your interview, and how you make your decision, you can feel confident that you are making a smart hiring choice. It won't always work out perfectly, but you can rest easy knowing you're doing what you can.

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