

This Woman Withdrew from the Interview Process After Being Told She Was the Strongest Candidate. The Reasons Are Instructive for Any Hiring Manager

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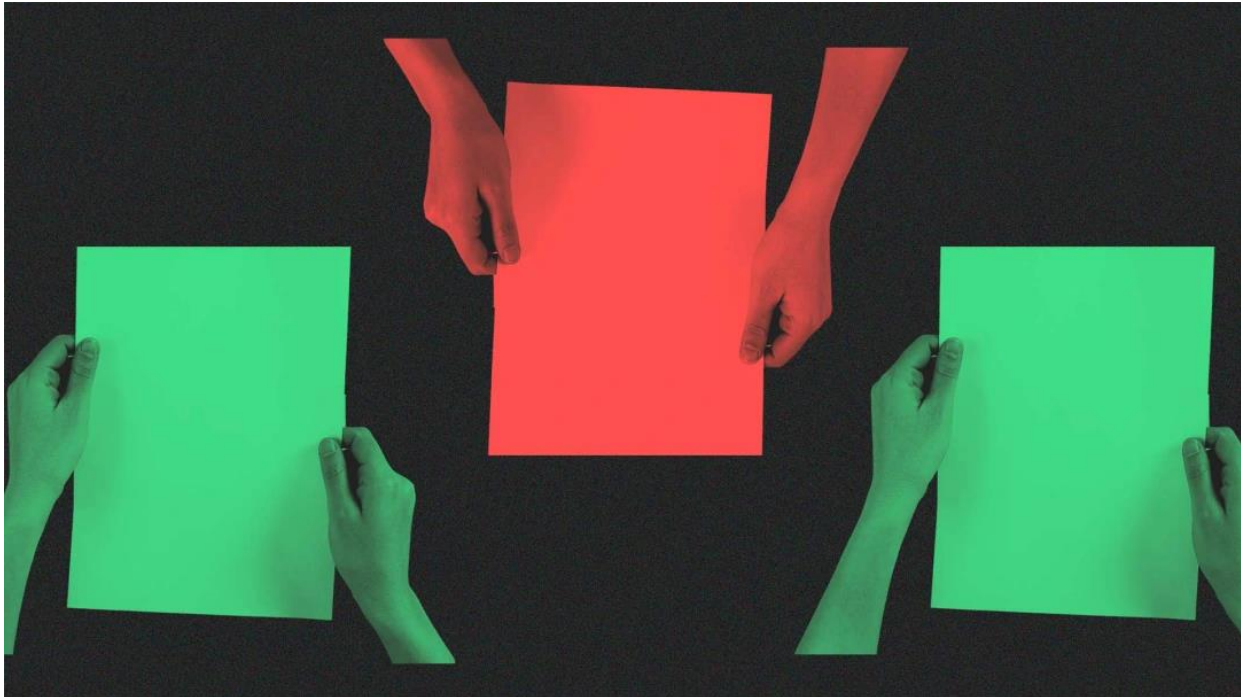


Illustration: Inc; Photo: Getty Images

One week ago, a New York City-based copywriter named Lauren Baer posted on LinkedIn saying that she had recently withdrawn her candidacy from a job. She loved the company. She was a strong candidate. So what went wrong?

In the post, Baer explained precisely why she said enough is enough -- and her reasons are a great lesson for every business owner and hiring manager out there.

Let's break it down:

Don't rely on your company or product reputation

Baer started off by saying:

"I withdrew my candidacy recently from a company I REALLY liked."

Being a cool company or having a cool product isn't enough to attract top talent. If your hiring processes are clunky or individual bosses aren't trained properly on how to hire, people may move on. Your hiring team really matters.

Be mindful of how you communicate with candidates

Baer continued:

A company where I had interviewed with five different team members, including the CEO. All of them agreed I was, and I quote, "the strongest candidate." The CEO said they were down to two people.

If you're telling candidates they are the strongest, why aren't you offering them the job? Are you telling multiple candidates they are the strongest candidate?

Remember, your goal is to fill the position with someone who can do the job. You're done interviewing when you find someone who can do the job. Yes, you can hope that there just might be someone better than this person you think is really strong, but if you put too much stock in that hope, you risk losing your good candidate.

Lastly, I'm not opposed to interviews with multiple team members -- as long as they are done promptly. If you bring people in on different days for these interviews, you may lose your best candidates.

Respect candidates' time

Baer also said she completed a skills test -- in fact, she completed more than one.

But at the last minute they wanted me to complete another writing exercise. On top of the two I had already done, and they had already liked. (Not to mention there was only meant to be one when the hiring process was outlined.)

Baer is an experienced professional, with a portfolio of work that anyone can see. I reached out to her, and she explained that she not only did the first two writing tasks, but had the publicly available portfolio and offered to share additional pieces with the hiring team. It wasn't good enough for them. They wanted yet another custom piece.

Remember, unless you're paying your candidates for their time, you must respect their time. And while it's absolutely reasonable to want writing samples from candidates for writing jobs, there is a limit. Baer did two samples and had others available. She was willing to find a mutually acceptable solution; they weren't.

Carefully consider any hiring test

Even if she had written the third sample, it might not have been a great way to judge Baer's skills. She continues:

It [the third writing assignment] wasn't thought out, it was ill-defined, and the parameters meant it wasn't equitable if multiple candidates were tasked with it.

Writing assignments, or any assignment you give a candidate, should be well thought out, and every candidate should receive an identical assignment. You should give clear guidelines. The purpose should be well thought out. You should know precisely what you expect to learn from this assignment. In this case, before you give another writing assignment, you need to be very clear about what you expect to learn from this that you couldn't learn from the portfolio and previous assignments.

If you can't do this, you're just grasping for straws in your attempt to find a unicorn.

Get clear on what you're looking for

It had me questioning whether they knew what they were looking for. Whether this was symptomatic of a bigger internal problem. Even their ethics. So I withdrew.

If you don't know what you're looking for, how can you judge the best candidate? And Baer is absolutely right--an unclear hiring process can indicate bigger problems. If the hiring manager can't be clear while interviewing, a candidate may assume the manager won't be clear when supervising their work.

Extend an offer to the good-enough candidate

Today I saw the job listing was reposted.

So either I was the only candidate all along, or the other person withdrew too.

Moral of the story? When you like a candidate, extend the offer.

Yes, either they were lying about having two candidates, or the other person got fed up and ran as well. They found two people who could do the job, and instead of hiring, they kept pushing, and ended up with no one.

You're not 100 percent sure? Extend the offer. Another round of interviews or another task will have diminishing returns at best, or at worst have you starting from scratch.

This is a job. There is always a risk that you'll hire the wrong person, but you need the good-enough person. It doesn't have to be the perfect person. If you ever start to think you need perfection in a candidate before you extend an offer, take a look in the mirror and be grateful no one required you to be perfect for your job.