

**Hiring**

## **3 Common Hiring Mistakes New Managers Should Avoid**

by Whitney Johnson

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**Summary.** Hiring is hard — and it's one of the most important parts of any business. In this piece, the author shares three typical pitfalls that managers find themselves succumbing to: First, they look for someone who's identical to themselves. Second, they try to find... [\*\*more\*\*](#)

No one wants to hire the wrong person. The recruitment, interviewing, hiring, and on-boarding of even one new employee is a time-intensive process every manager takes seriously.

It's also one of the hardest skills for a new manager to learn, in part because — unless you're working at a very fast-growing company — you typically don't get a lot of practice with it. When you don't have a lot of opportunities to practice, it's easy for your learning curve to remain flat.

While there are many issues you're likely to be consciously aware of when you're hiring — like the specific skills the new person will need, and the tasks you want them to perform — each of us also has a subconscious mind at work. Before making your final choice about whom to hire, bring your subconscious and emotional motivations to the surface for examination as well. How are you hoping to “feel better” as a result of a new hire; what pain points do you expect to heal? If you onboard someone who can do the functional job you need done, but can't do the emotional job, no matter what they do, you will not be satisfied.

Here are some of the subconscious emotional motivations that we rarely address head-on, but which should be considered carefully:

**“If only I could clone myself.”** Lauren Rivera, a researcher from Northwestern, told me via email, “what most people are looking for is ‘me.’” Her studies concluded that “interviewers who lacked systematic measures of what their company was looking for tended to fall back on themselves and defining merit in “their own image,” meaning that the most qualified interviewees were those who best resembled their interviewers.” It's easy to want to make this kind of hire — a carbon copy of yourself. But they will be bored and frustrated quickly because there's no headroom for them to grow and advance. You already have you and don't need another you.

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If you're making this assumption, it's highly suggestive that you're not thinking about the employee's learning curve. You're thinking of onboarding someone to share your learning curve. Instead, the new



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employee needs a discrete role — and path for development — of their own. Hiring a new person is an opportunity to do something differently than before — to innovate. Before you hire someone solely as a way to shrink your own task-list, ask if you may be better served by delegating some tasks to other team members, offering them new mountains to climb. Or perhaps the solution lies in better application of technological tools, rather than additional people. If you really do need to hire someone

new, don't hire a mini-me. Hire someone who brings something new to the team.

**“If only I could find someone to do all the annoying stuff that I don't want to do.”** This impulse, while understandable, is an even more dangerous one. Sure, it is tempting to avoid the responsibilities you find tedious or challenging. But you'll have trouble attracting talented people to a job that's mostly boring work. If you want to off-load everything that you detest doing, mostly junk work, it's likely you'll disrespect the person you've hired to be your dumping ground (a sentiment they will be inclined to return).

A more disturbing version of this problem is when a manager wants to hire someone to take on not the boring work, but the “dirty work.” It's not just new managers who make this mistake — a few years ago, I was invited to interview for the CFO role at a fast-growing tech company. There are a lot of roles a CFO can play, but when the COO said to me, “I want to hire someone to tell everyone what they can't spend,” I realized he wanted a henchman.

In my experience, managers like this aren't usually conscious of wanting to hire a scapegoat. They just really want to be liked — but that means they have to hire someone else to do the unpopular tasks of cutting costs, firing employees, or enforcing policies. It's a waste of talent and experience.

This isn't leadership. You will have retention problems forever if you think this way when hiring. Just as looking for a clone may mean you need to delegate more, looking for a henchman means you need to delegate less and willingly assume more of the disagreeable work yourself.

**“If only I knew how to do that.”** There may be tasks that demand attention but you don't personally have the expertise to complete them. You value this skill in other people, and it's what you're looking for in a new hire. But there can be a couple of pitfalls with thinking this way. Sometimes, there's an undercurrent of envy — you may feel threatened because they have talents you lack. Or you may put them on a pedestal — we do this all the time when we say we want to hire a “unicorn” or a “ninja.” Either way, you risk overpaying financially — and emotionally. Not only that, if you don't understand the work they are doing, you may not have a clear sense of what path this person needs to be on to maximize their talent and overall productivity.

Instead, couch the emotion this way — “If only I knew what I don't know.” Don't just say it; learn to really mean it. How can you solve a knowledge gap? This is where diversity of thought, ideas and experience is crucial. Hire to add those invaluable assets. If you really want to move your organization forward you need people with varied skill sets. People seeking different learning curves. People who don't agree with you. You need to open your team to people who aren't like you, who challenge your thinking and who will tell you what you don't know. If you are lacking mastery over parts of the domain you manage, part of your own development path is to learn.

By investigating the emotional “job-to-be-done” of a new hire, as well as the actual job we need them to do, we become less likely to hire the wrong person for the wrong role, and more likely to hire a great person for a great role.

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