



Book Hiring

How to Find and Keep the Best People

Richard S. Deems, Ph.D.
Career Press, 1999

Recommendation

Richard S. Deems’ concise guide to hiring and keeping the best employees (even after they’ve left your company, as "lifetime affiliates"), is chock full of timely, solid advice for those who screen, interview and hire. Knowing how the other side is thinking will also come in handy for those who are job-hunting, so this little gem is really for job seekers, too. Written simply, directly, yet with a breezy, intelligent style, the book is filled with tips, lists, questions and sample scenarios that will get you through the process, whether you’re an interviewer or interviewee. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to anyone who’s hiring new employees, concerned about keeping current employees or hunting for a job.

Take-Aways

- Hiring the best people with the best minds is the key to your company’s prosperity.
- Keeping the best people is essential.
- Employees who leave can become lifetime affiliates of your company by becoming part of your external network of "best minds."
- Only the most talented employees will be able to keep up with rapid change.
- To attract the best minds, create an organizational reputation as a great employer.
- Constantly update your job descriptions.
- Thoroughly prepare to interview job candidates.
- In the U.S., don’t ask questions regarding age, gender, marital status, race, religion, disability or sexual preference.
- Ask questions designed to elicit the candidates’ qualifications and talents, but don’t grill candidates.
- Make candidates comfortable during the entire screening process.

Summary

Competing for the Best Minds

To hire and keep the very best employees, you and your organization must look closely at your management practices as well as your hiring practices. What good is hiring excellent people if you can't keep them? What good is hiring people if you don't place them in the right positions? Having a full workforce is only cosmetic. You need the right people in the right positions so that your company can grow, make a profit and even just maintain your customer base and market share.

“To be totally effective, you need to not only hire the best people, but you also have to have the kind of work environment that keeps the best people.”

You are competing for the best employees. You are also competing to keep them working for you. The results of today's hiring decisions will have an impact on your company for years to come. Hire and manage correctly, and you'll always be ahead of your competition because the team with the most talent comes out on top. When you hire and keep the best people, your workforce will be able to navigate through the continuous changes that shape today's business environment.

“Yes, there are a lot of good people, and even more average people. But best people? There are not enough bright people, enthusiastic people, energetic people - employees ready to work, to have fun and to excel at their jobs.”

The competition for the best people is getting tighter and tighter in the United States. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that there will be 151 million jobs in the U.S. by the year 2006, but only 141 million people employed. A 1998 study by the National Association of Manufacturers reported employee deficiencies in basic math, writing and comprehension skills.

“Exhaustive, detailed job descriptions have a tendency to produce positions in which people do just what is on the job description and nothing more.”

The August 1998 issue of Fast Company magazine reported, "There are simply not enough truly talented people to go around. That means that competition for the best people has increased and will continue."

Only the "best minds" will do when a company is determined to survive and prosper. Best minds are those people who uniquely combine intelligence, information and skill in a way that enables them to synthesize information and use their knowledge to address new and emerging problems. While experience in a given position is nice, even more important is the ability to think and apply information in different ways.

“In order to compete for the best employees, employers will be required to fine-tune their hiring practices in the next several years.”

Even the best minds aren't necessarily the very best people to employ unless they also have the necessary attitude - an approach to work that values continuous learning, encourages everyone's growth and is committed to the ultimate goal of living one's personal and organizational values.

Having a revolving door at your company costs a lot of money. The process of constantly recruiting, hiring, training and then doing it all over again when you need to let an under-performing employee go or when a bored, frustrated employee chooses to leave is a destructive cycle that saps your organization's energy, time and money.

“When you recruit, hire and retain the best, you're able to anticipate market changes and you will have a work force that is involved in continuous change-improvement initiatives.”

Hiring the best will reduce your turnover and improve your company's effectiveness.

The Hiring Strategy

When you have a position to fill at your organization, begin by examining the opening at three levels: the organization, the department and the job. Define your organization in a clear, concise, accurate statement, then do the same for the department and the job. If the job description hasn't changed in the past three years, throw it away and re-think it. Most jobs change, and a job description that's the same today as it was a few years ago signals a problem with the description, and therefore a problem with the mindset you'll have

while seeking someone to fill that position.

“Hiring the best will reduce turnover. So will effective management practices.”

Include the following in job descriptions:

- The responsibilities and outcomes, rather than a detailed list of how the work is to be done.
- The management and people skills required.
- The technical skills required.
- The performance skills.

Use language that reflects your real needs. Know what kind of attitude the person in that position should have. Does the job require someone methodical and analytical or someone creative and risk-taking? Be very specific in your description.

“You know from your own experience that interviews tend to make a person nervous. Asking questions in a way that does not end in a question mark, however, makes it much easier for the candidate to respond.”

Recruiting is more than just writing a good newspaper ad, or posting a job notice online or in the employees’ lounge. Effective recruiting begins with the way you manage yourself and your organization, and the way you’ve positioned the organization within the industry and among the general public. The most important recruiting strategy is to earn a reputation as one of the leading employers in your field and in your community.

“Small talk gives you the opportunity to assess the candidate’s general communication style and how he or she will fit in with co-workers and your organization’s work environment.”

Follow these guidelines when recruiting:

- Treat your job applicants with respect.
- Generate some positive media attention.
- Become the local experts.
- Let others talk about you, including your employees, your network and your industry at large.
- Use want ads effectively by creating the image that attracts the applicants you want.
- Build an applicant database.
- Use recruiters and headhunters, especially for hard-to-fill slots or leadership positions.

Preparing for the Interview

After you’ve reviewed resumes, interview the leading job candidates. Companies still use the interview as their major source of information when making hiring decisions. For that reason, you need to get the right kind of information during the interview so you can make the best decision. The candidate needs to prepare for the interview - but so do you.

“You can learn a great deal about the candidates just by the questions they ask.”

Step One - Select your candidates. Send thank-you notes to those you choose not to interview. Thank employees who may have referred candidates, even if those candidates are not selected for interview.

Step Two - Prepare your interview questions. Stay away from questions that elicit simple yes or no answers, which won’t provide you with much information. Create questions that invite candidates to talk about what they have accomplished and what they can bring to your company, including skills, intelligence and information, attitude, and specific abilities. Ask for specific examples of past performance. Keep your questions focused, not too open-ended.

“It always amazes me when women report that they’ve been asked, usually by male managers, intimate questions about their personal lives that have absolutely nothing to do with the job. Don’t even think about asking personal kinds of questions.”

Step Three - Prepare your questions. Consider these factors in creating interview questions:

1. Use rapport-building questions to put candidates at ease and get a feel for their personalities.
2. Make it easy for candidates to talk.
3. Address candidates by name. As you shake hands, look the person in the eyes and say something like, "Jeanette, I'm Dick Deems and I'm very glad to meet you."
4. Start with small talk to build a comfort level.
5. Take notes so that you will have information to review and share during the decision-making process.
6. Ask candidates to clarify their answers when necessary. Go with your hunches, but also challenge people by asking more questions.
7. Ask about candidates' failures and what they have learned from them.
8. Be alert for possible warning signs.
9. Invite the candidates to ask questions.
10. Close on a positive note, thanking each candidate for coming in, and describing the next steps in the hiring process. Don't leave people wondering what will happen next.

Gather additional information to supplement the candidates' resumes and your interview notes. If your company has any testing policies, arrange for candidates' tests and review the results. Review all recommendations.

Keep it Legal

In the United States, federal regulations and guidelines prohibit you from asking job candidates certain questions. These guidelines are designed to eliminate discrimination in the work place. Federal guidelines state that you cannot base a hiring decision on anything other than a bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ). You can't reject a candidate on the basis of age, gender, marital status, race, religion, disability, or, in some states, sexual preference.

The only question you can ask about age is whether the candidate is 18 years or older. A lot of discrimination occurs in the area of marital and family issues. Don't ask any questions designed to reveal information about a disability. Do not ask questions such as:

- Are you married?
- Do you intend to get married soon?
- Do you have children?
- Are you a single parent?
- Do you practice birth control?
- How many people live in your household?
- Do you live by yourself?
- Do you have someone who can take care of a sick child?

Do not ask any questions regarding ethnic origin or religion. If a question doesn't have anything to do with the candidate's ability to do the job, don't ask it.

Keeping the Best: Lifetime Affiliation

While workers today rarely stay with one company for the majority of their careers, let alone their entire careers, you don't have to lose talented employees entirely just because they no longer work for you. You can't keep every terrific new employee you hire. People leave for a variety of reasons, no matter how great your company is and no matter how well you treat your employees. Begin to think in terms of a lifetime affiliation. As Fast Company magazine's Scott Kirsner wrote in the article "Gone Tomorrow?" in the August, 1998 issue, "Forget all your old ideas about who works for you and how. The day someone walks out the door doesn't mark the end of your relationship with that person. It marks the start of a new stage in that relationship."

With this new business thinking, the goal is a lifetime affiliation in which key people - the best people - stay informed about your organization's work, feel free to return and become your staunchest supporters even from outside the company. They can refer job candidates to you, as well as new products or services. They can become a valuable part of the organization's external network,

assuring that you have contact with best minds both inside and outside the company.

About the Author

Richard S. Deems Ph.D., is the author of a number of business books and has been coaching job candidates for 20 years. He lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he heads the consulting firm WorkLife Design.
