

Finding the stand-out worker

Hiring the wrong candidate can cost a lot more than just recruitment fees. *HRM* reveals how to select 'the one' and what to do if you can't

They say finding a needle in a haystack is difficult. But actually, it is far harder to find a needle in a stack of other needles. That's the key problem facing recruitment managers every time they hire – it's often impossible to discern good hires just from a couple of interviews or the stock-standard résumé. Just like there are no perfect employers, there are no perfect candidates for most positions.

But having good hiring practices does help create a higher success rate in recruiting the most suitable talent on offer. The starting point, as recruiters tell *HRM*, is to be clear on the sort of individual wanted.

"Sometimes, hiring managers are hard-pressed to fill positions quickly, and this results in a hasty hire," says Josh Goh, Assistant Director of Corporate Services at the GMP Group.

Staff retention and attrition is the biggest problem in organisations. And in Goh's opinion retention strategies start with recruiting right. Finding the right candidate-organisation fit enhances staff engagement and hence, retention, while keeping staff attrition to a minimum.

"And with 'employer of choice' taking centre stage in recent times, companies are committed to upholding a favourable corporate image that would attract exceptional talent and keep current performing staff," adds Goh.

Estelle Wong, Director of Operations for Adecco Singapore, agrees. She adds that finding the right hire is a project in itself. HR needs to carefully and thoroughly investigate the backgrounds of all potential candidates. "Thoroughly reference-check your candidate short list," she says. "Talk to people that have worked with them and ask lots of questions about the areas that are really important to you."

It's also important not to exclude any candidate too quickly. Wong says sometimes the best applicants come from



Top 5 tips for successful recruitment

- + Don't make hasty hires
- + Hard skills can be easily found but soft skills (communications, negotiation) are often hidden. Scheduling face-to-face interviews is therefore a must
- + Selecting a candidate with the organisational culture in mind
- + Keep an open mind when hiring. The best applicants can come from a background that the hirer had not previously expected
- + Check, check, and then check again. References are a good way to get an all rounded perspective of a candidate

a background that the hirer had not previously expected.

Hiring check-list

Hiring managers need to consider a range of factors in their assessments. It's not just the "hard" skills that need to be checked. Job-related qualifications, knowledge and experience are obviously vital to the equation, but they are also the easiest to tick off. Most candidates without these skills are screened away early in the hiring process.

"Soft" skills, such as communication and negotiation ability, are often harder to detect, but become more apparent the more HR looks for them. That's why face-to-face meetings and interviews with clients can offer reveal so much more than simple email interaction.

At the same time, managers should not underestimate the impact their own corporate culture can have on the staff they hire. It's important to consider the candidate's skills in light of how they can be expected to adapt to the work environment. Goh says it's still essential to hire a prospect with all the necessary criteria, but it can do both the organisation and the candidate injustice if they are unable to integrate well into their new team or unit.

Therefore, it is good discipline to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the whole team, rather than simply the immediate skill needs. In this way, HR can consider how a new hire might enhance, or reduce, team dynamics.

While there are several factors to keep in mind during a recruitment exercise, hiring managers also need to keep an open mind, reveals Goh. "A candidate could be a diamond in the rough even if he or she may not necessarily fulfil all the job requirements," he says. "That's especially when a particular position is challenging to fill."



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This is where asking the right questions during an interview is crucial. Additionally, using personality profiling analysis can help to recognise suitable personalities for a role, Goh adds.

Why is hiring right important

Recruitment can take time and finding the right person is crucial.

Sometime employers make quick decisions just to get someone on board – but what then happens is that after a short period of time they realise that they made the wrong choice.

Managing the wrong hire

Talk to any hiring manager and they will often say what looked and sounded good at an interview turned out to be completely wrong once hired. It's clearly an easy mistake to make, so just how do you manage someone who turns out to be a "wrong" hire?

Identifying the reasons why the individual is not performing or does not seem comfortable in the current role is a good starting point. Karin Clarke, Regional Director, Randstad, says performance management is often the key here, although only if used as positively as possible.

"A lot of people use performance management as a way to manage people out of the business," she says. "But it should only be used to improve their performance so that they become better able to effectively perform the function required."

Where there is a lack of skills, the employee can be sent for training; where there is flagging interest or disengagement, the employee could be offered an alternative position within the organisation, assuming such opportunities are available.

And if the problem concerns a bad work attitude, most recruiters agree the employee should be counselled.

Whatever the problem, it will often be cheaper and more effective to make the most out of these "wrong" hires, rather than beginning the process again. "The onus, of course, does not fall on the managers alone," says Goh. "Staff should also be willing to work through any issues, especially if a reshuffle of roles is concerned – it could mean they may be required to acquire a different set of skills."

Still, HR also needs to know when a problem is irretrievable and act accordingly. "If it is an attitude problem, especially if they are a 'cultural assassin' or a 'company vampire' - draining the energy out of the business - then they are culturally the wrong person and it is detrimental to the company's morale," Clarke says.

"You then need to exit the person out of the business as quickly as possible, so as not to negatively impact employee morale and culture. It is important, however, that companies effectively manage those employees who are exiting the business - as this is an important part of protecting your employer brand in the market."

All recruiters interviewed stress the importance of conducting probity checks, particularly for certain industry sectors such as finance and banking. **HRM**