

Hiring & Retaining the Right People

There is no point in having the best product in the world if you don't have the best people to deliver your message. We have therefore compiled a list of suggestions to help with recruiting the 'right' people for your organisation.

- Prepare a Job Specification before commencing your recruitment process. From this you can prepare both the Job Description and the Person Specification. If this is a replacement post don't just use the old job description. Critically review it first - your priorities usually change over time.
At Miller McKenzie we use a Job Profiling System which is based on our psychological profiling system and can be used as a guideline tool to assess applicants.
- Where possible, allow sufficient lead-time. To speed up the process, pre-allocate some provisional interview slots in your own diary, and those of others who you wish to involve in the interview process - remember 'time kills deals'. Candidates may go cold or accept other offers during a protracted time lapse in the process. Wherever possible, allow an overlap with the previous incumbent to minimise your involvement of time and maximise their productivity.
- Arm the recruiter with the most pertinent qualifying and disqualifying criteria/questions so that you do not waste your time interviewing inappropriate candidates. Outline your objectives for the interview. You will need to 'sell' the opportunity to attract across the most desirable candidates - this is particularly important in the case of headhunted candidates. You will also need to stimulate sufficient flow of information to decide whether the candidate has:
 - a) appropriate personal characteristics: personality, intelligence, motivation.
 - b) appropriate 'managerial' profile: team player/leader, manager, manageable.
 - c) skills & experience pertinent to the role - first essential and then desirable.

If it transpires early in the interview that any of your 'essential' requirements are lacking or insufficient, bring the interview to a close as soon as possible.

If, when you see the candidates, you realise your original specification doesn't quite hit the mark (e.g. a desirable criterion should now be considered essential), make sure the recruitment consultant is informed of the change in specification. It is advisable to keep a written record of the criteria you set, and refer back to it, so that you know that everyone is pointed in the right direction. 'The best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour'. Therefore use experiential questioning aligned to your essential criteria. Employ the simple but effective STAR technique or your preferred alternative.

Situation - the candidate should give a concise outline to the scenario chosen which they will use to demonstrate their experience.

Task - if this was complex, a degree of strategic planning will have been required. Look for attention to external and internal environmental factors, possible ramifications, etc. If the task required a team response, who pulled the team together and took the lead? In a more simplistic situation the 'task' may be intrinsic.

Action - watch for the use of 'we' - you need to drill down to discover his/her specific value add. Try to uncover the behavioural specifics - what he/she did, said, and so on.

Result - a negative or less than hoped for result is just as valid as a positive result providing the individual gained valuable experience. Follow up with whether he/she would do the same again. However, it may not be appropriate to repeat the action even if it was successful - does he/she demonstrate awareness of the impact of the possible changes in the external & internal climate?

- Test the accuracy of the candidate's response by asking for a reference. If the candidate hedges, he/she may be exaggerating or misrepresenting the case.
- In most cases it is beneficial to involve a task at second interview stage. This should give you some insight into how the candidate will perform in the role. For example: 10-15 min presentation; technical test; prioritisation exercise; short debate on a given topic; practical skills exercise, etc. Behavioural or psychometric testing is also valuable for certain roles.
- Involve HR or seek professional advice on the legal tenets, internal policy, surrounding fair recruitment and selection if in any doubt. A mistake could be very costly.
- Whilst it is important to be as objective as possible in your selection techniques, this does not mean you should ignore your intuitive feelings. Most people pick up body language signals, but very few are clear on the analysis of them. If you have doubts, try to pinpoint precisely what led to these doubts and follow up on them. As well as the individual's ability to do the job, you also need to feel confident that he/she will fit in with the team and the company culture.

- When following up references, it is advisable to obtain a verbal as well as a written reference. In some cases the recruitment professional will pursue verbal references during the recruitment process. This has the benefit of providing valuable information before an offer is made and shields you from any come-back. If this service is offered, take full advantage of it by asking them to bring any specific concerns you may have into the conversation. You will, however, still need to take up written references yourself regardless of whether the recruitment professional has conducted reference checks.
- Before making an offer try to ascertain how likely acceptance is. Some recruitment professionals will pre-close the candidate on this and broker the offer for you, which can afford you greater flexibility. If you really want this person on board it may pay not to stint on the basic providing this will not be out of kilter with existing staff. The cost of a new hire is greater than most people realise. For a £40-50k salary the real cost to the company in the first year is in the region of £90-100k plus lost opportunity costs. So an extra £1-2k for the right person at the right time may be worth considering.
- The perfect candidate is a mythical creature. If you found someone who was a 95-100% fit there would be no room for their growth and development. They would therefore get bored and leave or stagnate and start dropping in performance. Look for someone who is around an 80% fit, but ensure that the remaining 20% is not in a crucial area or an area of knowledge that it would be difficult for them to master quickly.
- As you are not likely to find the perfect candidate, aim to identify any possible management issues during, or immediately following, the interview process. You can then keep a watchful eye on these areas and, hopefully, nip any problems in the bud.
- Once you have an offer and acceptance, your objective is no longer to find the right person; it is now to ensure that the individual you have selected becomes the right person. You need to make sure that they have all the information and tools required to do the job. Develop a good induction programme, which not only gives a good insight into the company, the marketplace, the role and your expectations, but also allows you sufficient freedom to get on with your job.
- Ensure that you get the level of training right - you need enough to ensure continued development and motivation, without allowing a time cost factor that will have a detrimental effect on productivity. In addition to normal induction requirements we recommend around 4 days a year (in addition to any product training required) for all senior staff. Ideally this should be fairly evenly spread.
- The costs of a new hire suggested above are, if anything, on the modest side. So failing to give attention to retention factors can be a very costly oversight.

Research shows that salary is rarely the main reason for people leaving. The most common reasons include: lack of feedback & recognition; the line manager; security; and opportunity for advancement.

- **Feedback & recognition:** It is important to maintain frequent and regular contact with the new member of staff. Sandwich any negative feedback between positive feedback and give clear guidance and instructions with agreed targets. Seek out, and actively listen to, the individual's ideas and suggestions. If these cannot be implemented because of the Company policy or strategy, or because they fail to take account of all the market forces or ramifications, make this clear and discuss alternatives. If they are good ideas they need to be seen to be followed through.
- **The line manager:** If you appoint someone else to be line manager, make sure that this relationship is going well. As people are normally only forthcoming with criticism of their boss to trusted peers you will need to question carefully, 'read between the lines', and watch for body language signals. If you fear there is a personality clash, consider the actions you can take to remedy the situation. Performance is nearly always enhanced when the person respects and gets on well with his/her boss. Sadly the reverse is also true.
- **Security:** If the industry, the market and/or the Company is suffering a downturn, your team members may feel under threat - especially the newest ones. It's important to take action as early as possible, as once they have started looking for other opportunities, the focus will be diverted from the job and it will be difficult to recapture their drive and motivation. Rumour and gossip can be even more damaging than bad news. From the outset, be as forthcoming as is politic and inform staff members of strategic initiatives to counter any difficulties faced. If you involve your staff they are more likely to feel part of the team and be prepared to work with you to counter any threat.
- **Opportunity for advancement:** Aim to groom your stars (that show potential for management or higher management) for promotion. Give people clear milestones for advancement so that they can track their progress - but don't move the goal posts further away. It is better to require more in the first place and reward effort early (i.e. prior to final result) than to add extra requirements later. If circumstances diminish opportunity for advancement, you may wish to consider offering opportunities for broadening experience instead, e.g. training opportunities; career or executive coaching; or additional responsibilities in an area the individual has expressed interest in.
- **Don't limit your scheduled meetings with the new employee to the first few weeks, or even months.** Once the honeymoon period is over, minor irritations can become significant drawbacks for the new team member. These need to be dealt with as soon as possible.

- Some recruitment professionals at the higher end of the market will maintain contact with the new incumbent and the manager for some months after the hire. Check whether this service is normally available and if it is, take advantage of it. As the recruiter is independent and has normally established a good relationship with the candidate, he/she is well placed to discover any pertinent issues and bring these to your attention.

The responsibility to ensure that your new hire is successful rests not only with you, but also with the incumbent. To encourage a proactive approach to this responsibility, after the first few weeks, ask them to determine and write down their goals and their strategy for achieving those goals. If appropriate, you can also invite them to conduct their own personal (or personal business) SWOT analysis. Follow up on the progress towards the achievement of the stated goals.

It's not only important to consider what makes people move, but also what makes them stay. The people, the management, team membership, enjoyment of the role, variety, the work environment, training, flexibility, status, loyalty, success, recognition & reward all feature here. But most significant is the 'significant others'. If your team has fun in their work, can feel proud of their contribution, and have a good relationship with their managers and peers; the most accomplished headhunter is likely to go away empty handed. However, if you don't manage to get this right for all the people all the time - you join the rest of the human race!