

Don't Just Fill Job Openings. Hire Great Team Members

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We all know what makes a great team: Great people. The key is to define “great” correctly to match potential new talent with the current and future competencies your company needs.

Leadership development and succession management are HR's two most critical talent management functions, according to our joint Inc./HR Certification Institute® (HRCI®) survey.

Long-term strategies, not just short-term fixes are required to fill skills gaps. When seeking the right fit for the organization, looking beyond technical skills to leadership qualities and potential will save money and ensure sustainable success.

“The goal with each hire is to build as much value as you possibly can,” says Brian Baxter, SPHR, the Chief Human Resources Officer of Modere. “Simply plopping someone into a seat diminishes those odds. You must invest the time to do it right.”

The first thing to do, in collaboration with your HR leadership, is clearly identify the core competencies and key attributes that will make the new employee – and therefore the team – great. What does your organization need the employee to accomplish? Start by choosing the most important skill or proficiency a great employee needs to succeed in the position. Maybe it's attitude, interpersonal skills, teamwork or a specific technical skill. Whatever it is, that attribute is the foundation for individual employees and for your team. Training can fill in the gaps, but this is the attribute almost every employee must possess.

Once you have clearly defined the core competencies you need, determine how you will assess each candidate. “If you have eight competencies that are important,” Baxter says, “why not have eight different people interview the candidate, with each focusing on one specific attribute?” While that approach takes time, the result is eight different perspectives on the candidate – and greater buy-in from the team on hiring decisions.

Finally, go past skills and attributes to evaluate cultural fit. Be deliberate about culture. Rely on a great HR leader – one with talent, experience and certification -- to defend key corporate values.

HR leaders are trained to look for competencies and cultural fit. Cultural fit, Baxter warns, is difficult to assess in a formal interview setting. “We try to interact with candidates in casual settings, so one of the interviews might be a lunch or dinner where we don't even talk about the job. We try to get to know the candidate better, because when you're trying to fill a team position, individual personalities and the overall culture needs to match up.”

But don't forget that great teams are often made up of individuals with complementary skills and work styles. If your team has outstanding technical skills, you may have the luxury of hiring a great team player whose technical skills need some degree of development. You may have the luxury of hiring an introvert who possesses exceptional hustle and drive, or a person with limited leadership skills but an incredible desire to learn.

Of course, that means knowing your team extremely well – and knowing what you need the person you hire to do.

Does that sound like a lot of work? It is, but the effort is well worth it. “The cost of a poor hire is more significant than the cost of putting a rigorous hiring process in place,” Brian says. “The implications of a hiring mistake ripple throughout the organization and even the candidate community. Candidates talk, especially in key industries and key skills sets. A great hiring process doesn't just help you find great employees; it also helps build your reputation as an employer of choice.”