

Hiring the Right Employee Requires Your Time and Attention



By Chuck Koch, Loss Control Consultant

Have you ever said, "I should never have hired that employee." I have heard this statement many times. Hiring the wrong employee can have a significant impact on insurance costs, production costs, and employee relations. Hiring the right employee can be a challenge, but with a little time, effort and preplanning you can establish an effective recruitment and selection process. Companies that elect to improve their current process will benefit by considering the following items.

Define your needs.

If you're unclear what you are looking for, it is difficult to hire a competent person. Document the job requirements and the skills and abilities needed to complete these successfully. This can be done through the use of job questionnaires and job analysis. Incorporate these in the form of job descriptions. List the requirements of those job functions that are both essential and non essential. A function is essential if removing the function would fundamentally alter the position. Documenting these will also help you meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"). Once you have determined the essential functions, list the skills and abilities that are required to accomplish these functions. Consider the requirements regarding education, prior experience, physical requirements and interpersonal skills.

Small employers who do not feel it prudent to be this formal will benefit by meeting with key supervisors and employees to list the job requirements, the skills and abilities of successful employees who hold these positions.

Recruiting.

Define how you will reach potential applicants. Many come from walk-ins, advertisements, the Internet and union halls. Schools, employment and temporary agencies are also good resources. The more you know about a potential employee the better your chances of making a quality selection. Encouraging employee referrals is helpful. Use current employees and your professional network to locate and learn about potential applicants. Developing a pool or list of employees that you can draw from when needed will prove beneficial.

The key is learning the vehicles that will produce the best quality employees and starting to build that pool.

Application Process.

Make sure every applicant completes and signs an application. Ensure your application does not elicit illegal information. Sample applications are available on the Internet or at your local forms supply store. Include a request for references from previous employers.

Use the application and accompanying documentation, such as a resume, for your initial screen. Invite only candidates who possess the minimum qualifications to come in for an interview. Remember, at this point you are better to leave a position vacant than to fill it with a person who cannot satisfactorily complete the minimum requirements of the position.

Prior to any interview, review the application. Information such as gaps in employment, length of service, etc., may be an area worthy of further investigation.

Interview Preparation.

Most of us are attracted to candidates that are most like us. Consequently, it is important to establish an interview process that allows the interviewer to look objectively between candidates minimizing personal feelings.

When you previously defined your needs, you determined the skills and abilities required to complete the essential job functions. Now, draft a set of interview questions that will help you determine what the applicant's skills and abilities are in these areas. Remember, your questions must be job-related. Open-ended questions that do not allow the applicant to answer "yes" or "no" are desirable. Avoid any questions that may discriminate against a candidate. These usually are questions that are related to age, race, marital status, sex or disability. It is illegal to ask if a person has had a prior back injury. You can state, however, "The job requires a person to lift 25 lbs. Is there any reason you can't complete this?"

When preparing for this article, I also found several examples of proper interview questions available on the Internet. Make sure you write your questions down for use during the interview. Once you have gone through this process save these for future use.

An objective system to quantify the applicant's responses to your questions is also beneficial. It allows you to objectively compare candidates. I have found a simple system of ranking a candidate's response to each question on a scale of 1-3 helpful. Weighing questions in a similar manner based on the importance of the skill, ability, or job function is also helpful.

Conducting the Interview.

A multiple person interview improves objectivity. Divide the questions among the interviewers. All interviewers rank a candidate's response to each answer.

Establish an interview schedule and stay on track. Remember, your job is to listen more than you speak.

Begin the interview spending a few minutes to make the candidate feel comfortable. Offer a beverage. Make small talk. Inform the candidate of the interview process. Instruct them that you will answer questions about the position once the interview is complete. Do not tell the candidate

enough about the job that you are providing the answers to your questions. Ask the questions prepared previous to the interview. Ask the same questions of each candidate so you have an equal basis for comparison. With rare exception, the only individualized questions should be to clarify information derived from the application review.

At the conclusion of the interview your team should meet to compare notes.

Reference Checks.

A reference check is a simple way to gain insight into an individual's past work experience. Even if a reference is reluctant to provide information other than the standard answers, it is still an effective way to verify that the information you received from the candidate is correct. In some occupations, failure to take this simple action may subject an employer to a negligent hire claim.

Selection.

You have followed your defined process and are now ready to narrow your list to your top candidates. Gather all interviewees and objectively compare notes. In most instances, you will be able to make the decision on the objective data. Any strong subjective feeling should also be discussed. Now is the time to reach agreement on your top candidate.

If you have not elected or are required by law to conduct job-related testing evaluations or assessments, you are ready to extend the offer of employment. Should you elect to complete any of the above, your offer should be contingent on successful completion of the above.

Job-related Testing, Evaluations and Assessments.

Substance abuse testing and background checks are required in many industries. Other companies may establish post offer medical exams or other job-related assessments. Many companies find these beneficial to help them determine if the applicant possesses the skills and abilities they are searching for. All testing, evaluations, and assessments must be job-related. Remember, you may need to defend these in litigation. The specifics and requirements of these are too numerous to discuss here. Consult your employment attorney should you choose to implement these.

Upon completion of these tests, evaluations, or assessments employees must be notified of the outcome.

Hiring the right employee is key to your business. Defining and implementing an effective hiring process requires both time and effort. Following this process will eliminate unnecessary waste and substantial frustration for your organization.