

Deadly Mistakes in Hiring

Also, today's work success depends increasingly on intangible competencies--like flexibility and cross-cultural literacy--rarely found on résumés. And as demand for talent is sharply increasing, supply is steadily shrinking.

Most companies make ten dangerous mistakes during the executive-search process, including having unrealistic expectations, believing references, and conducting seat-of-your-pants interviews.

Here's how to systematically avoid these traps.

The Idea at Work

TEN DEADLY TRAPS

1. Reacting: hiring someone too different from the problem person just fired.
2. Unrealistic expectations: demanding many contradictory qualities, like "high-energy doer and thoughtful analyst."
3. Evaluating people in absolute terms: "Joe is a good manager"--without clarifying that he manages processes well, but not people.
4. Accepting people at face value: not getting the full story of a candidate's background.
5. Believing references: trusting references' input without determining their credibility.
6. "Just like me" bias: highly rating candidates who are like you.
7. Delegation gaffes: assigning critical steps in the search process to ill-prepared staff.
8. Unstructured interviews: no prepared questions to reveal candidates' competencies.
9. Ignoring emotional intelligence: failing to assess candidates' self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills.
10. Political pressures: inappropriate agendas, such as pressure to hire a VIP's friend.

HIRING WELL

Successful--and systematic--hiring requires these three steps:

1. Define the problem you need to solve through hiring.
 - Clarify the position's current and future requirements, driven by your firm's strategy. Translate them into needed skills (e.g., comfort with uncertainty).
 - List required competencies in behavioral terms and get consensus on the list (e.g., "strategic vision" means the ability to inspire and guide others).
2. Creatively generate a candidate list.

- Contact people who can recommend several quality candidates (e.g., a major supplier CEO to recommend sales leaders).
- Consider unconventional candidate sources. (One president hired a director whom his predecessor had fired!)

3. Methodically evaluate the candidates.

- Conduct structured interviews in which you assess candidates' competencies through behavior-based questions (e.g., to measure team skills, ask, "Tell me about a time you led a particularly challenging team project.>").
- Meet with references in person if possible. Describe the open job and ask pointed questions (e.g., "How has the candidate performed while facing similar challenges?").