

HUMAN RESOURCES



# Finding a Top Performer Do You Have What It Takes?

written by Lisa Powers, PHR - President/Owner of Career Options



(920) 832-4500

LISA POWERS

LISA POWERS IS PRESIDENT AND OWNER OF CAREER OPTIONS.

WWW.CAREER-OPTIONS.COM  
PRESIDENT@CAREER-OPTIONS.COM

Own<sup>O</sup>ning a small company..... It means a life of luxury, daily golf outings, and endless free time, right? With all the hats a small business owner wears, it often means very little time to grab a quick lunch, let alone have any free time. It also often means having fewer resources to hire a part-time or full-time human resource person to handle the legal and hiring aspects. Many small companies do not have a designated HR person, so when a job opens up, the owner who already is pulled into several directions, has to switch gears entirely and try to focus on finding the “right candidate.” If he or she doesn’t have the time, this seemingly daunting task can often fall into the lap of someone who isn’t qualified or passionate about recruiting top talent; therefore, the cycle of bad hiring can begin.

These are some simple tips to follow when trying to fill a vacancy. As busy as we all are, I always suggest that a person take adequate time to screen, select and hire the right candidate. If you try to settle or rush the process along, errors inevitably occur and poor hiring decisions are made. Most of these issues are not new, but I think it is imperative to address them:

1. **Create Captivating and Intriguing Ads** – In order to do this, you must first have a current job description. If nothing else, it will help you to evaluate the “type of person” you want or don’t want. Too many companies write very BASIC ads that do not attract strong candidates. Good candidates want to be challenged and intrigued, so be sure to have an interesting ad. Part of a great ad is to attract candidates, but it can also be used to discourage unqualified candidates who respond to 100 jobs that they see on any given day. Be sure to list the main duties and “must haves.” If you can’t list the must haves or qualifications, then you are not ready to post the ad. Wait until you have ALL the necessary information in order to

save endless time and money during the recruiting process.

2. **Screen Carefully** – Be sure to look at dates and longevity. Review resumes for unusual gaps or discrepancies between resumes and applications. Many of these gaps are legitimate, such as being laid off, caring for children or elderly parents, or moving to another state for a spouse. However, be sure to evaluate their reasons to determine if you feel an interview would be necessary. I am surprised that many companies will choose to interview someone who worked for a competitor, or has industry experience but who was terminated for attendance or volatile behavior. Experience is wonderful but a strong work ethic is also needed to ensure success! In addition, see if he/she took the time to fill out the application completely, or if the candidate seemed to feel it was “a waste of his/her time.” If the application is incomplete, wonder how they will do on other projects that they don’t feel are valuable. Lastly, evaluate how far the commute would be. Numerous candidates are now declining positions that are more than 20-30 miles away due to the high cost of fuel. See if they have commuted to other jobs in the past. If so, they may be more likely to commit to your distance of travel.

3. **Conduct Phone Interviews** as an additional way to pre-screen candidates. Some hiring experts, like Peter Veruki, author of *Adams Streetwise Hiring Top Performers*, stress the importance of allowing the candidate advance notice to arrange the phone interview. Other hiring authorities prefer calling the candidate without warning to see how they can respond on the spot. Either way, during a phone interview, get quickly to the knockout questions like availability, willingness to relocate or travel, reasons for leaving previous jobs and especially salary. If a

candidate won't give a salary range over the phone, it could be a waste of your time to interview.

Listen how he/she answers the phone and if a quiet place is selected to talk. If the position requires good communication skills, determine if grammar and professional skills are present. Be sure to address any concerns that you have from the application or resume during this conversation as well.

#### 4. **Pick 3-5 Face-to-Face Interviews.**

Some owners or managers set up 7-10 interviews which only adds to the confusion. You can always interview more if you need to, but your phone interviews should help narrow your selection. Ask your receptionist if the candidate arrived on time and addressed him/her professionally. It is amazing how some candidates look over the receptionist and act less friendly or professional because they are not interviewing with him/her. I am always concerned if that first impression was poor because that could easily be the "true" personality, rather than the personality that is shown only during the interview.

Ask behavioral questions---Conventional interviews tend to focus on the candidate's biography and may often result in a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Behavioral interviews instead ask the candidate to describe how he or she handled specific real situations in the past. For example, you may ask, "Tell me about a time when you had a disagreement with a co-worker and how you handled it." Or, "You explained that you took care of the fundraising event in April. Walk me through it and tell me how you were able to successfully complete this project." Behavioral questions are great questions to ask because often people believe that past performance is the best indicator of future performance.

Furthermore, don't forget to sell your company during the interview! Make sure you have a positive brand and reputation in the community or key candidates will not be interested. Understand that you both are interviewing one another, and be sure to create an environment of warmth, honesty, and success.

5. **Ask for Follow Up** within 24 hours to express their interest. Have them summarize why they feel they would be a

good fit in the position. This is an excellent tool to see how motivated and interested they truly are. It also is a good way to see if they are detail-orientated and have strong follow-through. I will refrain from hiring anyone who doesn't follow up with me as promised.

6. **Conduct Reference Checks** – A hiring manager should be concerned if he/she cannot receive any detailed references on the candidate. While many companies only verify dates, great candidates should have previous supervisors or managers that you should be able to contact. I would highly caution hiring anyone without at least one reference stating that this person has a strong work ethic, attendance record, positive attitude, etc.

7. **Test Any Relevant Skills** – Many candidates say that they have strong skills when indeed they do not. They usually are not lying on purpose; they simply do not know. Many companies, such as Career Options, offer testing on Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Accounting, Spelling, Typing, Math, Measuring, Access, QuickBooks and other areas. These tests are a great way to gauge the candidate's skill level. For some candidates, low scores will put them out of the running, but other companies use these tests to merely plan on how much training could be required to get him/her up to speed in the position.

8. **Orientation/Mentoring/Leading** – This is one of the most crucial aspects of hiring. You can hire the best candidates in the world, but if you let them sit without feeling welcomed or properly trained, they will leave quickly, and with negative feelings about your company. Training is hard, especially when your company is understaffed. But, a month of training now might save thousands of dollars in the future. Employees enjoy working for managers that lead and mentor, so in order to have a successful company, you have to have passionate and energizing leaders.

Start with a strong commitment to finding an A Player and end with a path of leadership and motivation. You will be amazed at the outcome. Good luck and plan ahead!

