

Women's Business by Francie Dalton

Forgo egos, hire CEOs with substance

Hiring for top-level positions brings its own set of requirements and challenges. Go too long without someone in charge, and morale and productivity likely will suffer. Fill the position too quickly with the wrong person and the effect is felt far beyond the new executive's department.

This person often sets the tone for your company, so even the slightest miscommunication is amplified.

Whether you're hiring your own direct report or interviewing on behalf of others in your organization, you can avoid predictable mistakes by following these recommendations.

1. Evaluate the candidates as well as the credentials. Don't be so enamored by a candidate's credentials and background that you impute managerial competence and fail to assess behavioral fit. The ability to generate desired outcomes just isn't enough.

If the candidate's management style is antithetical to the needs of those who will be direct reports, it won't work even if the person can execute substantively. Determine what management behaviors will be effective and use them as the behavioral criteria against which you hire.

2. Steel yourself against the seduction of star quality. The concept of what constitutes good management can get clouded by a candidate's public prowess.

Dazzling networking connections have little to do with one's ability to manage others. Reputation outside the organization, no matter how illustrious,

cannot compensate for a lack of managerial capability.

3. Get comfy with the curve. Realize your own success is in part contingent upon making this hire successful. Admit there will be a learning curve and get busy helping your choice for the job get around it.

Permit the new leader to shadow relevant internal colleagues, include the person in key meetings and encourage questions about decisions and methods.

Understand that it usually takes 60 days for a new executive to settle down and begin to hit a stride.

4. Draw significant comparisons. Rigorously compare your organization's culture to that of your candidate's past employers. Make sure you hire a leader whose exposure to other organizational cultures is like yours or is like the culture you want to create.

5. Take your time. Don't bow to the pressure to hurry up and get someone on-board. You must subordinate your desire for a quick hire to the need for sustained success.

7. Guard against hiring in your own image. You're not looking for a clone or a best friend. You may, in fact, be recruiting a skill set to compensate for your weaknesses. Know where you need shoring up and be willing to hire accordingly.

8. Magnetic doesn't always equal magnificent. Don't hire based just on chemistry. It's not enough that you're comfortable together and seem to agree on

everything. Instead, identify the behavioral characteristics that your organization can and cannot work with. Then be relentless in your interviewing to reveal those characteristics. Identify the leadership qualities you seek and inquire specifically about them when checking references.

9. Behave. Behavioral interviewing is a technique that helps leverage your risk in making assumptions about a candidate's capabilities. Here's how it works. Let's say you're looking for someone who has the confidence to take initiative. Rather than simply asking whether or not a candidate possesses this trait, ask the person to tell you in detail about a few past instances that demonstrated considerable initiative.

How quickly the candidate responds, and how clearly the response depicts the trait you're seeking, will help validate whether the person possesses the desired trait.

10. Circle: The best answer. Use 360-degree interviews. Allow employees who'll be peers and subordinates of the new hire to participate in the interview process.

It's useful to create a scoring grid for important competencies and behaviors. Then summarize the scores and debrief the people who participated. Be prepared to ensure that emotions don't override the quantitative scores.

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