

Reprint

One-and-a-Half Hiring Tips

As featured in the
March/April 2014 issue



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Wiring Harness News



Loren M. Smith, CEO
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Two critical issues facing wire harness companies today relate to employees. One is the severe setback resulting from a hiring mistake at the management or professional level. The other is excessive turnover at the direct labor level--these issues, in my experience transcend all others in their universality.

Most CEOs I talk with have no shortage of stories about these problems occurring at opposite ends of the staffing spectrum. So if these experiences are so commonplace, they must be a chronic problem we just have to live with, right? Not necessarily. Believing we can do better, I want to share two approaches that might lift your hiring batting average. And what might surprise you about my "tip-and-a-half" is just how basic these ideas are.

Tip #1 The Tryout

In baseball, spring training is a mighty helpful tool for making sound decisions. Barring injuries, most opening day players are still on the team at the end of the season. So have you ever staged "spring training" for a prospective employee?

To hire factory workers, bring in applicants who have passed your preliminary screening and put them on the job on a trial basis. Agree to pay them a fixed amount for several days of work and assign them to a "supervisor" who is effective at orientation, training and evaluation. After the trial period and input from the supervisor and any others, either offer them full-time employment, or, if your supervisor does not see a good fit, briefly convey what they need to improve to enhance their employment prospects and wish them well in the future.



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Obviously, this approach can occasionally entail logistical hurdles, but many can be overcome by not sticking to a set formula. The candidate is currently employed? Maybe he or she can take one or two vacation days, and then your appraisal will have to be based on less observation. Or maybe the candidate can come in several evenings to work a few hours on the night shift.

A similar approach to hiring management and professionals can be very effective. A promising candidate who is unemployed might be brought in for a 30-day trial, giving both the candidate and you a substantial comfort level about assessing the fit. A potential hire who is employed will be restricted in how much exposure he or she can get, but, as mentioned above, creative adjustments can often be made. Even a little exposure beyond the interview phase can be invaluable.

It should be noted that this approach can call upon you to be broadminded about applicants who are out of work because they are the candidates you can more fully appraise. We all know, however, that there are plenty of understandable reasons a talented person might be out of work.

The principle at play here is that recruiting outside talent, regardless of seemingly impressive credentials, is a high-stakes game. Anything we can do to minimize that risk works in our favor.

Tip #2 Trusting Your Intuition

I am calling this a half-tip because it is not a hiring practice; it is merely a hiring perspective: Listen to your gut. Because making a hiring mistake is such a downer, it is human nature to “play it safe,” especially when filling a pivotal position. Yes, we need to be careful, but giving in to what looks right on paper when an inner voice is whispering, “Wait a minute,” can lead to a disappointing choice.

Let’s say you have met with Harry and Mary. For 20 years Harry has been doing precisely what is needed to fill your opening, and his references are fine. But something about Harry gives you pause. Maybe you don’t feel a lot of chemistry with him, and he is someone you’ll be collaborating

with every day. Mary, on the other hand, has far less relevant experience and will need more mentoring, but you sense that she’s a star in the making. Whom would you choose? And what if you are able to give Mary a 30-day trial?...

Our hiring decisions are crucial because missteps hamper overall productivity and our own. We had just devoted time to an important hiring process, and now we find ourselves immersed in one again. I hope these two suggestions, taking advantage of a trial period and paying attention to our intuition, will help ensure great choices.

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