

HOW TO AVOID A HIRING DISASTER

Recruiting the wrong person can be costly and time-consuming. Adrian Kinnersley offers some strategies for enlisting the best

With economic indicators pointing to a more positive outlook in the months ahead, treasurers may be turning their thoughts to hiring. During the recession, treasurers have had to cope with doing more with fewer resources. Now that growth has returned, headcount increases are back on the agenda. But given the more intense competition for the very best candidates, how can you make certain you attract and retain the right people? And how can you ensure your recruitment processes result in success rather than disaster?

Poor hiring practices are both costly and time-consuming. In fact, Harvard Business School estimates the cost of recruiting the wrong person to be between three and five times that person's annual salary. There can also be other consequences – not just for productivity, but also for the morale and motivation of the whole team. Reputation is another consideration, particularly if the 'bad hire' is at a very senior level. An example of this is the fallout from the debacle at the Co-operative Bank involving Methodist minister Paul Flowers. Flowers was appointed chairman of the Co-op's board in April 2010. Although he had no experience of banking, he got the job after doing well in psychometric tests. But the Co-op subsequently admitted to having a £1.5bn black hole in 2013, while Flowers was arrested for alleged drugs offences.

Recruitment can be expensive. Management time, advertising costs and consultancy fees can mount up. Even if you manage to source the right candidate, your early success can still result in a hiring disaster if they don't accept your offer.

So organisations that can develop an effective and efficient recruitment process will be consistently rewarded with the best hires. These are the ones who have the

ability to react quickly and which appreciate that they are selling, as well as buying.

Assess your needs

When a vacancy arises, there is a tendency to try and fill it immediately, but often it is worth taking a step back and considering the bigger picture. Can the position be restructured? Could the work be reallocated to someone else? Does the vacancy require a full-time person or is it a project that could be undertaken by a temporary member of staff or an interim manager? The very fact that the vacancy has arisen could well be a good opportunity for change, so assess what you really need – rather than what you may want – before embarking on the hiring process.

A good recruitment consultant can offer useful intelligence, such as whether a similar role exists with your competitors; how they structure their departments; and, historically, what has worked for them and – crucially – what hasn't. This can prevent you from heading down blind alleys with regard to your departmental structure or defining a role that is inconsistent with the rest of your industry. You may still want to go ahead with your original plan, but being aware of whether it is going to be easy or difficult sets expectations accordingly.

The job specification

The old adage of 'fail to prepare, prepare to fail' is nowhere more apposite than in the area of recruitment, and effective hiring begins way before the interview stage. You can't really evaluate a candidate's suitability and capabilities if you haven't thought through and clearly identified the objectives of the role in question. Job specifications can dictate the success or failure of your hiring campaign and you need a clear idea of what you want to accomplish before you can recruit

someone to fill a role. Consequently, taking the time to write a full job specification – and then getting feedback from all relevant stakeholders within the organisation – will allow you to fully assess the needs of the role. Ensure that you position the opportunity and company so that it appeals to candidates in the market.

One of the main problems with job specifications is that they tend to focus on a wish list of experience requirements, followed by a rundown of duties and responsibilities. But job descriptions can be much more effective selling tools when they also define the expected performance of the candidate by setting specific objectives for the role in question. This gives a clearer perception of challenge and an indication of what is required in order to succeed in the role. This could include what staff responsibility there may be, as well as any specific objectives and technical

10 NON-SALARY MOTIVATORS

- ◆ **Location** – nearer to home/less travel
- ◆ **Reputation** – how you are perceived as an employer
- ◆ **Stability** – financial security
- ◆ **Flexibility** – work/life balance issues
- ◆ **Ethics** – are you a 'good corporate citizen'?
- ◆ **Development** – training/opportunities to learn
- ◆ **Challenge** – new role/more responsibility
- ◆ **Benefits** – canteen/gym/car/crèche
- ◆ **Team** – similar outlook/diverse workforce
- ◆ **Technology** – more up-to-date systems/cutting-edge kit



challenges that may exist. Information that will 'sell' the role should also be included, for example, career development potential.

Know your candidates

It's also important to appreciate that contrary to popular belief, money isn't necessarily the main motivator when candidates move jobs. If you are using a recruitment consultancy, make sure you discuss the candidates' backgrounds thoroughly with the consultant before the interview so that you know which 'hot buttons' to press. Some candidates may be looking for a better work/life balance, an improved benefits package or the chance to work with cutting-edge systems. Knowing what the candidate wants can help you to match them with what you want – and gives you insight into what you can offer them to entice them to join.

The interview

While interviewing well could be the subject of an article in itself, there are some basics to note. Preparation is key so that you know which areas you want to explore. Also, and equally as important, remember that you are selling as well as buying. This can be the most overlooked part of any recruitment process. To do this, you need to put yourself in the candidate's shoes. Why should they join? What is it really like working at your organisation? Why do you like working there?



WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A KILLER JOB SPEC

- ◆ Major objectives of the role
- ◆ Technical challenges and problem-solving opportunities
- ◆ Staff responsibility
- ◆ Career development potential
- ◆ Outline of the company and the team

The offer

Even if you feel you have identified your ideal person, it can still turn into a hiring disaster at offer stage, since a motivated and enthusiastic candidate can soon lose interest if an offer is delayed. If the person is right for the job, then don't hesitate. You can always make an offer subject to references. Set the earliest start date you can. The longer the time lag, the greater the chance of losing them.

Check and double-check

While it is obviously a no-brainer to take up references before your chosen candidate starts work, it's also worth double-checking qualifications and education. There have been some high-profile cases in the press concerning senior

figures who were not quite what they seemed. For example, Dr Dennis Thomas Delcaron O'Riordan enjoyed a successful international legal career for 20 years until a disciplinary panel suspended the 51-year-old from the bar for three years for conduct that was 'dishonest or otherwise discreditable to a barrister'. O'Riordan claimed to have been an Eldon Scholar and the recipient of two first-class degrees from Oxford, as well as a masters degree in law from Harvard. In reality, he attended the University of East Anglia, where he gained a degree in law that was not first-class.

And finally...

Never forget that the mobility and flexibility of talent in the global generation is the most valuable corporate currency of the future. Being able to source, attract and retain that talent will be the difference between those organisations that thrive and those that don't. ♥



Adrian Kinnersley is managing director of **Twenty Recruitment**, a multidisciplinary professional recruitment consultancy with offices in London and New York