

Making the Hiring Decision

By Cheryl Crumb

You've interviewed 10 candidates. Who to choose? There are a lot of methods out there: eeny-meeny-miney-mo, heads-tails, s/he's just like me.... You've put a lot of work into the selection process so far; don't blow it now. Continue to be structured and methodical and avoid playing hunches.

There are evaluation landmines to keep in mind:

The Halo Effect. This is the candidate who talks or looks a good game. They have such immediate appeal that it can cause you to dismiss all other competencies.

Believing Everything. Be cautious about taking everything the applicant says as "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". Few candidates are open about their failures and fears. Be prepared for exaggerations and cosmetic camouflaging.

Being rushed. Urgency is seldom a prerequisite for good decision-making. When you feel you haven't yet found the right person, but business pressures appear to be demanding a decision, don't allow yourself to compromise. The real price is usually paid later.

The Mirror. If the applicant is much like you, don't fall into the "mirror, mirror on the wall..." syndrome. We tend to most highly rate those individuals who are just like us. Consider, would you want you as your doctor, banker, financial analyst? Likely not!

Overemphasis on Business Experience. Jim Collins in his book "Good to Great" says that in selecting the "right people", the good-to-great companies placed greater weight on character attributes than on specific educational background, practical skills, specialized knowledge or work experience. They viewed these traits as more teachable and learnable than dimensions like character, work ethic, and dedication to commitment.

THE 4-MINUTE DECISION.

There's research out there to substantiate that interviewers make big picture evaluations very early in the interview. Often these assessments are not linked to valid indicators, i.e., wimpy handshake, dress. The remaining interview time is often spent in seeking out information to reinforce the immediate negative assessment. We unknowingly distort, select out, forget or disregard important information.

OVER RELIANCE ON REFERENCES.

Consider as your first premise that any name given to you by the candidate is likely to result in a glowing reference. Even past employers hesitate to say anything negative for fear of being sued. Having worked in an HR Department, the rule was: don't volunteer anything just confirm dates and salary.

What's next?

First, go back to your competencies. Weight those business indicators that are most crucial. Equally weight those self-esteem or emotionally human competencies that are critical to job success. Ensure you understand the behaviours associated with all competencies. Ensure that other key individuals in your organization buy into the selection and definition of competencies.

Secondly, get others involved. Hiring decision effectiveness correlates to the number of people who systematically participate in the process. Research by Egon Zehnder International suggests that a second evaluation reduces the possibility of hiring error from 50% to 10% while a third evaluation practically guarantees a good decision. Try including: the manager, the manager's manager, co-workers, HR, and customers.

Thirdly, take good notes during interviews and allow yourself 5-10 minutes after the interview to capture your assessments on paper. It's guaranteed that if you do back-to-back interviews without reflection time, all candidates will start to look alike. And the only ones who will stand out will look like you!

Fourthly, do what you can to get the real truth out of references. We already said that momentum is against you. How can you get your unfair share of good information? Bypass HR departments. Speak to the direct manager if possible. Forget general characterizations. Begin by describing the job and the challenges. Ask questions like: What similar challenges did X face in this job? In what kind of situations could you count on X doing a good job? In what kind of situations did X

need more coaching and support? What kind of supervision did X require? What advice would you give me in working with X? Ask: What was the first emotion you felt when X left? Would you rehire X? Why? Why not? Verify factual information. Remember, you're getting information from a stranger whose competency is untested, so don't hold their opinion as scripture. Assess not only what was said but how it was said. And then, after you've heard all the answers, keep it in perspective. Look for themes and patterns.

Create a grid or chart to help you capture and analyze the bits and pieces. Rate each of the candidates against each of the competencies. You may use a scoring system of 1-5 or a high-medium-low designation. Make notes to substantiate your ratings. You may even weight higher those competencies that you value the most. Discuss your assessments with the other interviewers. Challenge the numbers by looking for evidence. Where are you collectively consistent?

Look at the risks for each of the leading individuals. In our unweighted example above, Fred has the highest score (28), but he's lower-scoring in the technical areas (red print). Mary, the second-highest score (27), has the best technical scores, but the blandness of her human competencies might be a concern. Consider what competencies might improve with training. Fred might get his website design score higher than a 2 with a short course. What's the likelihood that training will improve Mary's initiative?

With the guidelines of this series firmly in practice, congratulations! You are now the proud employer of Ms. or Mr. Right! There's nothing more important than having the Right people on the team.

And having the right people on the team is key to building success for the entire organization.

	Team Player	Initiative	Customer Focus	Problem-Solving	Work Ethic	Website Desing	Electronics Understanding	Total
Bill	5	4	2	3	4	4	4	24
Sally	3	3	4	5	2	2	2	23
Fred	4	5	4	5	2	2	3	28
Mary	5	3	3	3	5	5	5	27