

Ten Steps To Successful Hiring

An MXOtech Whitepaper

Every company needs to make smart decisions in interviewing, hiring and retaining good people. In this article, MXOtech Founder President Joanna Sobran shares a “Top Ten” list of tips that she employs to recruit talent for client companies as well as for her own. These are practices, Joanna believes, that every company – large and small -- can use in implementing a successful strategy for getting and keeping the best people.

1. Step One: Interviewing

The time and effort you put into your interviewing process is key because it affects your entire culture from the beginning. You create your company’s culture with the people you hire, train and sustain. Make sure you or your trusted managers know how to hire and that they follow these basic steps.

2. Step Two: Job description

Make sure that you have a current job description and that your managers see and agree with it. This may seem obvious, but jobs have a way of changing over time and it’s critical to your organization that you have accurately described the need before you hire a new or additional person for the job. The ad you run or distribute to others must reflect the description or you’ll be interviewing candidates who do not meet your ‘real’ criteria.

3. Step Three: Phone screens

Take time to phone screen candidates and pick out the top two or three you feel are best suited for the job and for your company. You can really narrow down your search on the phone. I always review the candidate’s resume in detail before I call and I pick out a few good questions that are basic and some that are related to their resume. Be as conversational as possible so that the candidate is more relaxed. When people are caught off-guard, they are more likely to answer questions truthfully and you can compare those same questions during an in-person interview to see how they compare. Write your questions down so you remember what they said over the phone.

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4. Step Four: Prepare good questions

My favorite ice breaker question to ask over the phone is: What type of position are you looking for? This is a great way to start a conversation and it will tell you very quickly if this candidate is a good match for the job. For example, in a search for a Network Administrator, the first qualified candidate I called told me that he was now looking for a Management position in a team environment. This wasn't a good fit for the position I had open. I wanted someone to work independently in a very technical role. Even though his resume was very technical he wanted to move into a management role. By asking this question I eliminated spending time on a candidate that wasn't a fit for this job and perhaps eliminated hiring the wrong candidate who might have taken the job until he found the "right" opportunity.

Another great ice breaker question is: In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? Or: What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

5. Step Five: Ensure your candidate is prepared

How much does this person know about your company? Another simple question once the candidate is invited to interview in person: "Did you have a chance to review our web site?" It's a conversation-starter, but it's also a chance to see how much preparation the candidate did, and how interested or qualified he or she might be. For example: "What specific products or services do we offer"? "Describe our company in one to two sentences", "What did you like about our company"?

One candidate answered this question by telling me, "Yes, I spent a lot of time on your site last night." My follow-up question was "Tell me about the three different services we provide." She started to fumble and said, "Web development...well I'm just not real technology savvy, so I can't really explain it." Of course for an opening at a technology company, this wasn't a good response. This told me that the candidate probably didn't spend a lot of time on our web site as she indicated and didn't have a good understanding of technology.

6. Step Six: Check references

Always check references. At least two should be from previous managers and one from a peer. You will learn a lot from references. If you are harboring any doubts about a candidate, they will likely be confirmed during a reference. People can also confirm positive feelings you have about the person, especially if the personality in question is low-key (as long as you're not hiring him or her for a job as a sales person!) These conversations can confirm your decision either way.

7. **Step Seven: Do additional research**

I recommend that you search this candidate on the web. The web is a great tool for finding out more information; there are several sites depending on the age group – www.linkedin.com – www.dogpile.com – www.facebook.com and www.myspace.com. It's amazing what you can find out through these sites. If there is information that conflicts with what you've been told by the candidate, you are then free to ask about it.

8. **Step Eight: Consider testing**

I recommend giving your final candidate a personality or skills test. You can sign up at www.brainbench.com for a free test. This is another way to confirm your own instincts and your reference-checking, and feel that you have made the right decision. There are plenty of other testing sites that are fairly inexpensive. Be sure to consider skill tests and cognitive tests.

9. **Step Nine: Include your current staff**

Introduce your potential candidate to some of your staff. In a smaller company, you don't even need to ask for their feedback. They will tell you anyway! And it gives your current staff an opportunity to be a part of the process. If the new candidate appears to be a good fit with your company culture, you have another clue provided on the wisdom of this match.

10. **Step Ten: Bring your new hire into the fold**

Speaking of company culture, it has repeatedly been shown in surveys to be one of the key factors in successful recruiting. My staff members bring us leads because they believe in our company and because they enjoy working at MXO. They feel passionate about it as your employees and managers should feel about your company. Make sure the transition from hire to successful employee is smooth.

In our next issue, we'll bring you Ten Steps to Creating a Successful Corporate Culture.

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