



# Hiring headaches

We've all made mistakes when recruiting key staff, but taking the time to get it right will save a whole lot of bother. David Parmenter shares some tips to help you avoid the pitfalls

**I**n every workshop I ask the question, 'Who has made a recruiting decision they have lived to regret?' Every manager puts their hand up. Why does this happen?

Many will recall occasions when the interviewee has arrived and you have not yet reviewed the CV or prepared for the interview. This puts you on the back foot, and a smart interviewee will be in control.

Yet recruitment should be seen as a key activity. It should be the most invested and well-prepared exercise, for three reasons. Firstly, it's like putting a fence on the edge of a cliff. It's better to spend 40 hours doing it properly than 400 hours cleaning up after a mistake. Secondly, you can recruit for technical skills and, through training, improve skill levels, but you cannot change a person's values. If these are different from those of the organisation, you will always have conflict. Finally, better recruits will lead to more internal promotion, which saves costs and maintains institutional knowledge.

Management guru Peter Drucker noted five recruitment tips:

- \* Understand the job – not just the duties, but the skills and expertise required – so you have a better chance of a good fit. If you have a previously high performer in that role, model the job on their traits. However, Drucker said you should never give a 'new job to a new person'. He believed that outsiders don't stand a chance of implementing new systems due to concerns over change, a lack of credibility and the overpowering nature of the default future. Instead, appoint and train a well-respected in-house manager who has a pile of 'I owe you' favours they can call on.
- \* Have three to five people on the shortlist to maximise your chances of the best fit. There are often only one or two suitable candidates, but Drucker warns that this is not enough: cast your net wider to attract more interest.
- \* Study candidates' performance records to find their strengths so that you can ascertain whether they fit the job. Remember

## Next steps

- 1 As a priority, read *Winning* by Jack Welch and Suzy Welch, published by Harper Business, 2005.
- 2 Train your managers in 21st-century recruiting techniques.
- 3 Email me ([parmenter@waymark.co.nz](mailto:parmenter@waymark.co.nz)) for 14 questions you should consider asking in an interview.

that the CV and the interview will be a set of smoke screens. We need to use modern recruiting techniques such as in-depth checking of references and qualifications, simulation exercises, psychometric testing and assessment centres, and involve members of the team who the candidate will manage.

- \* Talk to candidates' previous bosses and colleagues. Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, would call a previous employer and ask, 'We have Joe Bloggs shortlisted for a general manager position. If he was re-applying for a similar position in your organisation, would you want him back?' Welch was surprised at the honesty: if he got a 'no', that was enough for him to cease the recruiting of that candidate. What he wanted to hear was, 'We would love to have him back; he made a significant contribution.'
- \* Once the choice is made, make sure the appointee understands the assignment. They should hit the ground running, aided by a thorough induction and some easy goals. ■

David Parmenter is a writer and presenter on measuring, monitoring and managing performance

For more information:

[www.davidparmenter.com](http://www.davidparmenter.com)

