

13 Reasons Managers are “Unlucky” When Making Hiring Decisions

BY NELSON SCOTT



Shortly after Harold's first day on the job, Shirley sensed something wasn't right. This was not the person she had interviewed and hired. During the interview, Harold seemed to share Shirley's views on customer service, teamwork, and the importance of time management and organization. However, his job performance told a different story.

Harold was often late and his work area was a disaster. Shirley had first hand evidence of his indifference and occasional rudeness towards customers. Co-workers seemed to go out of their way to avoid contact.

What had happened? How had a seemingly perfect hire gone so wrong? In conversation with other managers Shirley concluded that she “was just unlucky”. They understood. “You can't be lucky every time you hire. You'll have better luck next time,” they assured her.

Shirley and her colleagues are typical of many managers who believe that successful hiring is a matter of luck. After thousands of interviews, hundreds of hires and more hiring mistakes than I care to admit, I have identified 13 reasons that managers are “unlucky” when hiring. Better luck comes to those who recognize these common mistakes and take action to avoid them.

- 1. Hasty hiring** – Some managers believe that it is essential that vacancies be filled immediately. To avoid a few weeks of pain, these managers will risk months of anguish by rushing to hire someone with anything approaching suitable credentials. While filling a vacancy quickly is desirable, ensuring the right match is more important. This may take time.
- 2. Not understanding what makes employees successful** – Who are the company's best employees? What do they say or do that makes them successful? What attitudes do they bring to work? How do they handle common work situations? “Are you systematically trying to find people with similar characteristics to add to your staff?” asks Betty Saunders in *Fabled Service*. “As elementary as this may seem, it is seldom practiced.”
- 3. Limited recruitment efforts** – Classified advertising may attract resumes, but this is not your only source for new employees. Post notices at employment agencies. Put up signs and leave application forms where customers will see them. Ask employees or customers for referrals. Exercise recruiting creativity.
- 4. Too little time reviewing resumes** – Job seekers carefully craft attractive resumes. They choose just the right words to show themselves in the best light. Managers should take as much care in reviewing resumes before deciding who to interview. They need to look for evidence that the per-

son behind the resume has the same attitudes and skills as their best employees. They must avoid being impressed by the latest buzz words. If something on the resume is unclear, they need to make a note to ask for clarification during the interview.

- 5. Decisions based on first impressions** – First impressions often become lasting ones. Some managers decide early in the interview whether or not to hire. Effective interviewers delay judgment. They understand that shyness or nervousness may prevent a candidate from being at his or her best as the interview begins. As the interview progresses, interviewers may hear more of what is needed to make a quality hiring decision, if they are still listening.
- 6. Biases get in the way** – Intentionally or not, some managers make hiring decisions based on factors unrelated to job performance. Ignoring for a moment the human rights laws that these decisions violate, managers need to think about how the talent pool shrinks when they eliminate candidates based on their age, gender, race, religion, family status or sexual orientation.
- 7. Talking too much** – Interviews are a time for managers to get to know potential employees, not for them to learn what a great person the interviewer is. Successful interviewers ask brief, well-designed questions and then listen for the answers. Talkative interviewers often end up interviewing and hiring themselves. A well-prepared interviewee listens for opportunities to agree with everything the interviewer says, whether or not this reflects the candidate's true beliefs.
- 8. Asking the wrong questions** – Answers to many common questions yield two things: information the interviewer already has and information that is virtually useless. Why ask about schooling and work experience when this information is available from the resume? Why ask candidates to describe their strengths or goals for the next five years? Hundreds of books and seminars prepare candidates to describe their strengths, weaknesses and future plans. The answers to these questions provide little information that is useful to the interviewer.
- 9. Not asking the right questions** – Managers want to know is whether or not the candidate can do the job. The best way to find out is to ask about previous work experiences. How a person dealt with a situation in another job likely shows how he or she will deal with similar situation in the future.

Managers must compare the interviewee's responses to what their best employees would do. If the interviewee is in line with them, make a job offer. If he or she isn't, keep looking.

- 10. Well-rehearsed answers** – Hiring guru Robert Half observed, “The greatest strength of some job candidates is their ability to impress the people who interview them.” An almost limitless number of books provide job seekers with scripts for answering frequently-asked questions. Memorizing these responses prepares the interviewee to dazzle interviewers. Effective interviewers don't settle for these superficial responses. They probe for additional information.
- 11. No notes** – Some managers think it unnecessary to take notes. Even though they have great memories, they will have difficulty remembering which candidate said what, especially if the interviews occur over an extended time. Because most people remember best what was heard most recently, the last person interviewed is the one hired more than half the time. Keep this Chinese proverb in mind: “The palest ink is better than the best memory.”
- 12. Wasted reference checks** – No manager would invite a complete stranger to decide who to hire. This, however, is what many managers do when they ask references if they would hire this person again without knowing the criteria used to judge employee's performance. What managers learn when they ask about the candidate's strengths and work habits is not much better. For more useful information, managers must ask how the candidate dealt with specific situations in the past, or, they must seek confirmation about what they heard during the interview.
- 13. Gut feelings** – When the interview ends, some managers make decisions based on how they feel about the candidate. A “good feeling” leads to a job offer. Effective interviewers follow their heads, not their hearts. They assess candidates based on how well they meet the job's success criteria.

Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock wrote, “I am a great believer in luck, and I find that the harder I work the more I have of it.” Successful staff selection is not a matter of luck. Success comes from hard work to overcome the 13 reasons managers are unlucky when they make hiring decisions.

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