



HRXaminer

*Examining practical HR issues business owners
and managers encounter every day*

Hiring New Employees: Beyond The Guessing Game

May 2006

Test for the Truth

You don't have to do this hiring thing alone!

- ▶ **If you can't think of good questions to ask** in the interview, create a questionnaire committee and brainstorm thought provoking questions that really bring out the candidate's values, work ethic and true skill set.

30 Minutes Doesn't Cut It

I had the pleasure of conducting half-day programs on my Employee Life Cycle model of supervision to three groups of public health managers recently at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. It was lots of fun meeting these wonderful people from all over the country.



Even though I'm doing the "teaching," I also learn during these sessions. The greatest lesson I re-learned was that no matter who we are and where we are leading people, the issues are standard across the board. We all fall into the same traps and get stuck

▶ **Test the candidate's skills.** Don't take their word for it. Ask them to describe how they tighten that widget, create a mail merge, create a new product... whatever is relevant to your position. Have them take a basic math test, or quiz them verbally. Have them sit at the computer and create a quick Word document or PowerPoint presentation.

▶ **Test their reaction.** Tell the candidate about the tough parts of the job and see how they react. "The worst part of this job is the _____. What was the worst task in your last position? How did you survive?"

▶ **Assess.** There are a wide variety of

in similar places.

On Sunday May 14th, my comments on Cover Letters were presented in the Minneapolis Star Tribune Jobs section. As I was reading the article to see what tips the writer, Matt Krumrie, had included from our discussion, <http://www.startribune.com/197/story/429444.html>, it reminded me of my UNC training sessions.

I think we are short-sighted in our hiring processes. When I informally polled the attendees at the 3 UNC sessions, only a small percentage of managers spent more than 30 minutes interviewing their applicants before making an offer. As jaded as this might sound, I think that any one of us could pass a 30-minute interview on a variety of positions we are totally unqualified for -- and get the job!

I know that these 150+ managers are no different than the 1000s of managers struggling to find qualified, dedicated employees. Our candidates are better skilled at providing the right answers, than we are at asking the kinds of question that elicit real answers. Unfortunately, I'm not offering you any "magic" questions to ask. But there are ways you can improve screening, interviewing and hiring candidates.

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Avoid the "Evil Twin" Syndrome

personality and work style assessments available as a double check into how the candidates presented themselves. What kinds of gaps have you experienced? There will be an assessment to help you fill that gap -- whether it's Meyers Briggs, Profile International, DISC profiles, Winslow Assessment or a visit to a psychologist. A second unbiased opinion can save you thousands.

▶ **Reference check.** Check professional references. Check education documentation. Check work history. Sadly, we can't make assumptions that everything in the resume or in the interview is factual. Don't drop the ball here.

I've asked readers before how many times they extended a job offer to the "perfect" candidate only to have that person's "evil twin" show up for work! The more work you do up front to really get to know people before you hire them, the better off you are. And in 30 minutes you don't know diddly about why you should hire a candidate. You are much more likely to know who not to hire, than whom to hire.

Systems... systems... systems. If you're winging your interview and selection process, chances are the candidates you're getting match the caliber of the work you're putting in. No pain no gain. Create a structured interview process, then keep enhancing it. Chances are the first one won't work perfectly. Don't give up. Keep tweaking until you start getting consistency in your candidates.

1. **Define who you want to work with/for you.** This can include: skills, abilities, personality, appearance, interpersonal traits, experience, consistent work history, quality professional references, talents, interests,... The list doesn't end. Brainstorm everything you want in your "fantasy" employee. Rate each fantasy item by what you want them to have vs. what they must have.
2. **Screen your resumes and applications consistently.** Compare your fantasy with the

▶ **Get help.**

Sometimes you can't do it all alone. Whether you call me to help with this process, or use a temp-to-perm hiring process, or a headhunter, if your schedule is too tight to address hiring, ask for help. I've scripted interview questionnaires for clients, written employment ads, screened candidates, telephone interviewed, live interviewed and reference checked for clients. I can do one piece to get you started and to save you time, or can guide you through the a-to-z of hiring.

▶ **Have fun!** Some of you don't believe hiring can be fun. If not, you may want to delegate this to someone else in your organization and then

reality of the applications, looking beyond face value. Look at job titles and task descriptions. Look at length of service at each organization and advancement in the job. Look for gaps in employment and inconsistency of information. Is your opening an opportunity for growth for this individual, a lateral move or a step backward? How long has the candidate been searching for work? There's so much information you can glean from this process. Keep your critical eyes open. Don't make assumptions.

3. **A word on applications:** Make sure each candidate completes an employment application in addition to submitting a resume. The application gives you the opportunity to see how they write, word usage, grammar, messiness, etc. It's your first employment "test." Depending on your ending paragraph, their signature also provides you authorization to perform reference and background checks.
4. **Telephone interview.** I'll assume that you have more candidates you're interested in than you have time to dedicate to a face-to-face interview. The telephone provides you a great opportunity to screen out people whose communication, skills, salary requirements, job history, personality, etc. don't match your needs. In 5-20 minutes, you can

have final approval. But the more fun you're having in the process, the more fun and real your candidates will be during the interview. And that's what we want to see -- the real person we're hiring.

**If you're not
having fun
with your
human resources,
call Arlene today
at 952-996-0975**

narrow down a pile of prospective candidates to a more manageable number to interview.

5. **Script your interviews.** Your telephone interviews, live interviews, team interviews, follow up interviews, etc. should all be scripted. Take each item on the job description, tasks as well as KSA (knowledge skills and ability) items, and create an intricate, open ended, "describe for me how" question on each item. I know you're thinking, "That will take forever!" And it might. But once you develop deep questions, prying for their real knowledge, experience and opinions, fewer evil twins will show up at your door.
6. **Multiple interviews.** One interview isn't enough. Everyone can fit in at one short interview... Interview them twice. Involve peers or other managers in separate interviews. Give them a tour and see how/whether they interact spontaneously with employees. People connect differently with different people. Use others as your barometer.
7. **Be critical.** Listen to your "gut" and the "gut" of others. What concerns do you have? Can they be overcome or are they premonitions of failure? Does the individual have the passion for doing the job or are they flippant about it?

It's painful, time consuming and deflating to terminate someone after they've been hired. Take the extra time to hire the right people the right way, and your evil twins will disappear.

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About Arlene Vernon

Arlene Vernon, PHR, partners with small businesses as their Human Resource Xpert to create their HR systems and solve their HR problems.

If you have gaps in your HR operation, have an employee problem to solve, or want to enhance your managers' skills, call Arlene today. Learn how HRx can save you time and help you avoid costly HR mistakes. HRx, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN 55344, 952-996-0975, www.HRxcellence.com.

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