



CONSULTING SCOOP



We Found a Rock Star! Hiring the Best of the Best

[By Lonnie Pacelli]

Colleagues, I feel your pain on this issue.

Scenario #1: You've got a critical position that needs to be filled by a qualified candidate and quick. For every day the position doesn't get filled, your inbox fills up a bit more with work to be done because your unfilled position hasn't been staffed. You see tons of resumes and have interviewed scores of candidates, but the rock star you're looking for isn't emerging. You refuse to "settle" for a mediocre candidate, but the work is piling up, and you've got to do something.

Scenario #2: Three months ago, you thought you had the perfect candidate for a job and decided to hire him or her. You negotiated a compensation package, relocated the candidate, and did some internal public relations work with the team. Two months after the candidate hit the job, you realize that your candidate was a PURE (previously undetected recruiting error); the candidate had a major issue with responding to pressure and would become rude and angry with peers, employees, and customers whenever the heat was turned up. You're now faced with either making a massive investment in the person or making a job change. Not a pretty picture.

Finding the right candidate for a job can be highly frustrating for both managers and recruiters. If you wait too long, the work will keep piling up, and your management may start thinking you can get along without the position. Pull the trigger too soon and you risk hiring a candidate who is a PURE. There are legitimate situations where it just takes a long time to find a suitable candidate. You need to minimize the situations where you either hire the

wrong candidate or take forever to find the right one. Here are some simple techniques to help you find that rock star for your organization:

Know what you are looking for—Sounds pretty basic, but I have been amazed at how frequently managers dust off job descriptions that haven't been changed in years to use as the bases for hiring new employees. Hiring from an outdated job description can lead to ineffective resume screening and poor-fit candidates. Give the job description a good working over, and ensure that the skills documented in the job description accurately reflect what you're looking for.

Use multiple interviewers who can focus on different skills—Based on the job description, your candidate may need a combination of functional, technical, leadership, and people skills. A candidate who may be a technical whiz may also have the people skills of a head of lettuce. Use trusted interviewers who have expertise in each area of focus and ask them to drill the candidate for their respective areas to ensure that the total skills package is there.

Look beyond the obvious—One of my best hires several years back didn't meet the stereotypical requirements of the job but had some outstanding core skills that were easily translatable to the new job. Had I stuck with my mental image of what I was looking for, I would have rejected the candidate during the resume-screening process. If your job for a procurement analyst requires strong analytical skills, consider looking at candidates from other functional disciplines—i.e., finance—to fill the role. I've continually been amazed the number of times "out-of-the-box" candidates have become rock stars. Don't limit yourself to candidates with stereotypical requirements.

Get glimpses into their critical-thinking skills—OK, so you've probably heard about the "why-are-manhole-covers-round?" type of questions and may be chuckling at the prospect of asking a candidate such an off-the-wall question. The truth is, critical-thinking questions are a great way to understand how candidates think through problems, how they respond to pressure, and how quick on their feet they can be. I've changed my hiring decision (both ways)



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based upon the critical question I asked during the interview. A great approach to this is to think about your own business and create some hypothetical questions; i.e., if you're an automobile manufacturer, ask candidates how they would design a car that gets 200 miles per gallon. Think about the "tough questions" you can ask and observe your candidates as they wrestle with their responses.

Get 100-day plans from candidates—Wondering what candidates will do if they land on your doorstep? Ask them! During your final-selection process, ask each of your candidates to put together 100-

day plans of what they would accomplish during their first 100 days on the job. This technique is very effective in assessing how candidates will take the ideals discussed during the interview process and put them to action if they are to be hired.

Give peers and candidates' prospective employees a voice—A key aspect of candidates' fit potentials is how they will get along with peers and, if the candidate will be managing people, his or her prospective employees. You may have a functional and technical maestro, but if he or she doesn't have the teaming or collaboration skills, you might be creating

a mess for yourself and the team. Just be cautious to get a cross-section of opinions; you don't want to base team chemistry decisions on just one person's viewpoint.

There are rock stars out there who can deliver value to your organization; just make sure you focus on some of these basic hiring strategies, and you'll get the best of the best driving results for you.

For more information on Lonnie Pacelli, check out www.leadingonedge.com.

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