



How to Hire the Very Best: 3 Critical Steps and 3 Revealing Interviews

You've been in business long enough to know that hiring someone for an open position in your company is not an easy task. Especially if you're looking for a quality employee.

Perhaps you tried to hire someone at one time and everything blew up in your face. Or perhaps you've heard a war story like this from another business owner and are putting off hiring completely.

The problem is, you're crazy busy and you desperately need quality people working for you to meet the demands of your growing business. How do you do that?

Here are the 3 critical steps for succeeding at this important task:

STEP ONE: Know exactly what you want this person to do.

Any new hire is doomed from the start with a lack of clarity around the job. Most small business owners hire out of desperation when they're overwhelmed with work. "We need to get some help around here!" they cry. So they do, and it only produces more work for them not less.

Knowing what you want this person to do is critical for hiring success. This means having a job description for this position. Not any old job description, but a detailed job description that explains in full exactly what it takes to do this job.

Along with a job description, you'll need a list of one-year accountabilities: the measurable outcomes this person will be responsible for delivering in their first year on the job. Without these two things, again, a new hire is doomed to fail. As with anything in business, you get what you measure.

Yes, writing a detailed job description and one-year accountabilities will take some effort, but the up-front investment will save hours and hours of wasted time and thousands of hard-earned dollars that comes from one bad hire.

STEP TWO: Gather a pool of candidates. The bigger the pool the better.

The most common small business hiring mistake I encounter in my practice is the failure to gather an adequate pool of candidates. Busy business owners, desperate to fill an opening, often give a job to the first person that's available or an unemployed family member.



Other small business owners, a bit more savvy than that, at least interview a few people before hiring someone, but this doesn't qualify either as an adequate pool of candidates.

The idea is this, the bigger the pool of candidates, the more likely that top talent will be present. More milk, more cream. Right?

How do you do this?

Fortunately, technology has made it easy. My clients have used Craigslist and other free--or very low cost--job posting sites like Monster.com. They've announced the job on their own web site and contacted their email list.

They've also used existing employees, offering a \$50 bonus to anyone who recommends a candidate who ends up being a top four finalist (Beats the cost of a newspaper ad, doesn't it?). All formal and informal sources need to be diligently pursued.

Here's what's essential: a pool of people from which to pick 3-4 finalists. A pool is at least a dozen, preferably 20. With technology tools available today, however, you can easily get 20, 30, and even 40 applicants for any decent job opening.

STEP THREE: Inject truth serum into the interviewing process

Once you've written a complete job description for the position you are seeking to fill with a list one one-year accountabilities; and once you've assembled a pool of candidates from which to make your final selection, you're ready for the truth.

No, people don't really lie in their job interviews (most of them don't anyway), they just put the best spin on things. Your job is to use the interviewing process is to get past the nice words and pretty smiles and get down to the actual reality. Here are three kinds of interviews that will do that for you:

The Phone Screen Interview

If you've done a good job sourcing candidates, you should have at least 40-50 resumes. Right now, with the high unemployment rate we are experiencing, it's not unusual to receive over 100 resumes for an open position.

A few of these resumes, maybe as many as a dozen, will rise to the top, but you will not be able to thoroughly interview all of these applicants. The place to start is with the phone screen interview.



What you're wanting to do in the phone screen interview is to find the best of the best for the open position you have. Every person that's made it to your top ten (or so) list should be asked these questions in this order, according to The A-Method of Hiring designed by ghSmart and Associates:

- What are your career goals?
- What are you really good at professionally
- What are you not so good at, or not interested in doing, professionally?
- Who were your last 5 bosses, and how will each rate your performance on a 1-10 scale when we talk to them?

Good phone screen interviewing should get you down to the top three or four candidates that you will meet with face to face and conduct the next kind of interview, the CIDS Interview.

The Chronological Interview

The Chronological Interview is based on the simple premise that the past is the best predictor of the future, not personality tests or talent profiles. In his book, Topgrading, Brad Smart extensively documents this premise and presents the Chronological Interview as the key to hiring success, a "silver bullet" as he refers to it.

In a Chronological Interview you ask these seven questions to every finalist about every job they have ever worked at:

- What were you hired to do?
- What were your responsibilities?
- What were your successes in this job and how did you achieve them?
- What were your failures?
- Who was your boss (How spell?) and what were his/her strengths and weaker points?
- What's your best guess as to what your boss will tell me were your strengths and weaker points?
- Why did you leave this job?

Expect to spend about 75-90 minutes or more per interview, but be prepared to learn more about a candidate than you have ever learned through any other interviewing methodology, time well spent in achieving hiring success. Again, the best predictor of the future is the past.

A best practice in conducting Chronological Interviews is to do them in tandem. That is, two people interviewing one candidate. This brings two sets of eyes, two sets of ears, and two perspectives to the table, not just one. A slick candidate may fool you--a busy



business owner--but usually can't fool your battle-hardened assistant. Or both of you at the same time. Right?

Now you are ready for the next kind of interview, the Reference Interview.

The Reference Interview

What, we haven't checked references yet? Yes, that's right. Reference checking, because of its time consuming nature, is the last thing you do in the hiring process. Here's how to do it right.

After completing your Chronological Interviews, ask the candidates you would consider hiring--and only the candidates you would consider hiring--for references. But you pick the references, not the candidate, based on the information you learned in your Chronological Interview.

Now have the candidates set up the reference calls, not you. When candidates do this, the chances are better that you will actually hear the unvarnished truth. In fact, a candidate's timely completion of this exercise in itself is telling.

When a reference calls you, here's what to ask. Again, as referenced in *The A Method of Hiring*:

- In what context did you work with this person?
- What were this person's biggest strengths?
- What were this person's biggest areas of improvement *back then*? (The key words *back then* opens the door for honesty)
- What would you rate his/her overall performance in that job on a 1-10 scale? What about his/her performance causes you to give this rating?
- The person mentioned that he/she struggled with _____ in that job. Can you tell me more about that? (Again, this question opens the door for honesty.)

The real point of the reference interview is to test theories you have developed regarding this candidate in the Chronological Interview and to see who follows through on this exercise to insure you get the very best person for this position.

I've personally repeated this process over and over again, for hiring myself and hiring for my clients, and it get high quality, consistent results. Knowing you can fill any open position that comes your way with a quality candidate is tremendously powerful and allows you to grow with confidence.