HOW TO BALANCE HIRING FOR CULTURE WITH HIRING FOR SKILL

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You've hired a new employee who's a great fit with your existing staff. You can already picture team meetings and post-work get-togethers with this new staff member. But what if you discover the new employee can't perform the critical skills required for the role?

"Organizations need to hire for performance *and* culture," says Mike Kennedy, director of marketing at **Talent Analytics, Corp** , a workforce analytics provider. "If you have a great company culture but employees that don't perform, you're going to close your doors," he says.

At the same time, if no one on your team gets along, that's also a problem that can impact productivity.

"Focusing on skills and ignoring culture could give you someone who crushes both their goals and their relationships with teammates," says Heather Neisen, human resources manager for **TechnologyAdvice** , an online service business matching software vendors to business technology customers.

If you're unsure how to balance hiring for specific skills with hiring for business culture, here are four tips.

Clarify Your Business Culture

Before assessing whether a job candidate is a good fit for your culture, make sure you and your team know exactly what that culture is.

"One of the keys to successfully hiring … is the organization has to define its culture," says **Charles Krugel** , a Chicago-based human resources attorney and counselor. But defining a business culture may be easier said than done.

"However, I also caution companies that they also need to be aware of their own biases, especially if these biases relate to any of the legally protected classes, such as race, national origin or religion," says Krugel. "If company culture is biased in such ways, the employer can be held legally liable for these biases."

To clarify your business culture, start with the basics. Jay Rao and Joseph Weintraub described six building blocks of a business culture in the Spring 2013 edition of **MIT Sloan Management Review** . Certain values, behaviors, climate, resources, processes, and successes were found in businesses with an innovative culture. Whatever your business culture is, make sure your current and prospective staff understand it.

"This definition of culture (or what can also be called a mission statement or other popular vernacular) should be made public so that all potential employees are aware of what it is so that they can assess whether or not they're capable of fitting in," says Krugel.

Put a Balanced Hiring Process in Place

The next step is to identify candidates who fit both the culture and the technical or skill requirements of a role. But how do you balance all the necessary criteria when going through the interview and hiring process?

"We do focus a lot on the culture fit of a potential hire, but that doesn't mean we ignore skill," says Neisen of Technology Advice. Her company established a 13-step process and a scoring system to help eliminate snap hiring decisions and identify key factors in the cultural fit and skill level of each candidate.

Neisen says a focus on goals and professional growth is part of the Technology Advice culture, so the hiring team knows that a person requires a certain level of ability to also have a great cultural fit with the company.

For us, the scoring is a weighted combination of goals, attitude and work ethic – you must have all three," she says.

Test Drive Potential Hires

To really balance out the culture versus skills question, why not test drive candidates to evaluate both? This is what Technology Advice does with potential hires.

"Bringing them to the office for a few hours and giving them a specific task reveals how they work with our team and if they have the skills necessary to do the job," says Neisen.

Additionally, it gives candidates a taste of what it's like to work there. "It also gives them an idea if they'll truly like the job and the team," she says.

Be Flexible

Hiring a new employee isn't an exact science. Depending on the role the person plays in your business, you may lean more towards a highly skilled individual for one position, and choose a candidate who is a better cultural fit for a different position. Kennedy says to also look at the culture within your business.

"Sales teams have a different culture than engineering teams, so one size does not fit all in terms of what traits to look for," he says. " Instead, identify what top and bottom performers look like, then hire against it."

At the same time, Neisen says while it's important for your top performers to work well with each other, beware of hiring just one "type." Instead, she says to consider what's driving each applicant to your company.

"It's always the primary goal to find people who are motivated to work hard for your team, deliver results, and grow as a professional while truly enjoying the entire ride," says Neisen. "Sometimes if they have the passion and personality to fit your team and your goals, you can overlook slight skill deficiencies in lieu of training them up as they go."

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