

AVOIDING A "BAD" HIRE

...due to a misfit with the corporate culture

By Bruce Dingman

When filling a senior level position, it is often not that hard to find candidates with the right experience – in today's job market there are many competent executives available. However, having the right experience and skills does not guarantee success in a particular position. In fact, the largest reason anyone fails in a job is not ability...it's attitude.

A major factor is how well the person fits the style or culture of the existing management team. Most hiring authorities understand the culture of their own organization, but if they do not understand the importance of a candidate's values, management style, and personality, then even they would benefit from the insights I'm about to share.

When interviewing a candidate, ask about the environment in which the candidate has worked. Don't forget to ask the same questions when interviewing the candidate's references. Some useful questions include:

- Which places did you like best and what was unique about those environments?
- What environments did you like least and what were those characteristics?
- How well did you perform in the different environments?
- How casual or formal was the workplace environment? (Were people on first-name basis? Was a coat and tie required? Was having a large office or a reserved parking space important?)
- How were results measured? (Was it important to have "face time" and work 60+ hours? Could workers telecommute? Was it okay to take an afternoon off to attend a child's award assembly?)
- What did you like and dislike about your past supervisors?

The responses you receive from your candidates and their references will give an indication of the candidate's values and management style, and how well they might match your particular employment environment. If there is not a match, the likelihood of this candidate working well in your culture is not necessarily minimal, but it is more difficult to determine.

Another aspect to consider is how well the candidate understands your company and the management team he or she will join. If the search is not confidential, then allow the top candidate to meet with the peers and direct reports individually (and confidentially) to get their opinions of the work environment, culture, and expectations. This is the opportunity for the candidate to ask, "Why do people who join this team succeed or fail?" If there is no candor in this part of the process, then the likelihood of a bad fit is increased.

Another useful tactic is to invite the candidate and spouse to dinner with the hiring supervisor and spouse. In this more relaxed environment, the candidate and supervisor will likely get impressions about one another that might have been suppressed during formal interviews.

With these steps, the superior and the candidate should be prepared to make a better-informed decision on whether the candidate should join the team, and the likelihood of the employment relationship lasting at least medium-term is significantly enhanced. This process takes time – and sometimes laborious. But finding just the right person is so important that these are vital steps to consider.