Hiring for Fit

How to avoid hiring mistakes and get the right person for the job
One of the biggest challenges facing oil and gas companies today is hiring qualified employees. Experienced workers are retiring in large numbers, and there just aren’t enough knowledgeable people prepared to replace them. This makes it even more imperative that managers learn how to hire the right people, the first time. Wrong hires result in a loss of hard dollars, not just in the obvious cost of recruiting (job boards, search firms, etc.) but also through softer costs in lost productivity, time for new-hire training, and costly mistakes.

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates the average cost of a bad hiring decision can equal 30% of the employee’s first-year potential earnings.

One bad hire with an annual income of $50,000 = $15,000 potential loss for the company

Ask a technical or operations manager what he/she looks for in a new employee, and typically you will hear that experience and technical knowledge are important. But when the job market can’t produce the necessary experience, as we’re seeing in 2014 and beyond, the hiring manager needs to look for deeper qualities – work ethic, willingness to learn, enthusiasm, and team mindset. There is an old HR adage, “Hire for attitude; train for skill,” and during this time of talent shortage, this becomes an important philosophy to keep in mind.

It’s fairly easy to evaluate an applicant’s knowledge/experience by giving a written or verbal pre-hire test. But most hiring mistakes happen because the intangible qualities were not as carefully assessed as the technical. What are intangible qualities in the work
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environment? That varies considerably from industry to industry, or company to company, but there are some attributes that are common to most.

- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking ability
- Team focus
- Strong work ethic
- Positive attitude
- Willingness to learn or change
- Respect for others
- Sensitivity to leadership and management structure (chain of command and following directions)

So how can you flesh out those more difficult qualities in the limited time of an interview? First make a list of the qualities that are essential to succeed on your team, and design some questions focused on those attributes. From your list, you’ll design behavior-based questions.

A behavior-based interview requires the applicant to describe specific situations in his/her past jobs, which will help you to watch for the qualities mentioned above. Here are some examples:

- **(Problem solving)** Tell me about a time that you solved a problem in plant operations. What happened and how did you solve it?
- **(Team focus)** Tell me about a time that you helped a co-worker complete a task, even if it wasn’t part of your normal job duties.
- **(Work ethic)** Tell me about a time when you were required to put in extra hours, come in early or stay late; how did that work out?
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- **Respect** Tell me about a difficult boss you’ve worked with in the past; how did you handle it? What was the outcome?

When you ask behavioral questions, watch for the applicant’s reaction and how long he/she takes to come up with an answer. Can they give you an actual situation, or do they try to shift into what they “would do”? You don’t want to know what they would do; you want to know what they have done.

Industrial psychologists will tell you, “The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.” So if you do your best to determine past behavior, you are on the right path toward hiring the right person for the job.

References
Christina DesMarais, “How to Hire the Perfect Person Every Time” Inc., March 17, 2014

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