

Get SMART: Prepare Before Making a Hiring Decision

No general would go into battle without a battle plan. In fact, much planning goes into developing strategies that prepare troops to respond tactically to the opposing army's reactions.

These strategies and tactics ensure that the general's troops go into battle fully prepared with the best chance for success. The same is true in the hiring process.

Whether you're the hiring manager or the human resources manager, you must organize, communicate and prepare your hiring team with strategies and tactics that ensure the best hire possible for your organization. If your hiring team is on time, fully prepared and welcoming during the interview, with clear messaging and well-thought-out answers, highly qualified candidates will be interested in the position. On the other hand, if your hiring team is late, rushed and disjointed with obvious internal conflicts, candidates will sense the tension and you will lose the best.

Raise the preparation bar to stand out from the crowd of other competing opportunities. The best strategy is to be extremely well informed long before you



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*In his new book, *The Right Staff*, Pat Ropella writes on best practices for SMART (Sourcing, Marketing, Assessing, Recruiting & Retention, Training & Transformation) talent management. To get your copy, www.Ropella.com/therightstaff*

start evaluating resumes and definitely before you start the interview process. But how do you get started on a path to improvement?

Get SMART

Hiring the right talent can make or break your career. The last thing you want is a hiring process exploding upon takeoff on your watch. By implementing the SMART Talent Management System, you will source, market, assess, recruit, retain and train (SMART) the best talent.

First, you must prepare for the search by developing an effective selection process to ensure that the flow of information extends to the entire selection team. Good information flow will help you avoid common communication challenges between HR and the hiring manager, such as:

- Collecting hundreds of resumes and submitting them to the hiring manager only to get feedback such as, "Not interested," "too light," "too heavy" or "Did you even read the advertisement I gave you?"

- Having employees, who read the position description for their own position, realize, "That's only 50% of what I do," or "Boy, my job sure has changed."

- Supplying candidates to human resources, hiring managers and/or your boss after comparing a resume to an outdated position description.

You want prospects so satisfied by the quality of your information, knowledge, and understanding of the position you are recruiting them for that your credibility and expertise motivates them to trust you, listen to you, and ultimately work with you. Let's look at the steps of the search preparation phase to make the best hire for your organization.

Save Time and Money

Hardwiring a selection process at your organization is more efficient and cost-effective than the fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants method that so many organizations use. The time it takes to fix your hiring mistakes is 10 times what it would take to fix your process. More importantly, the cost of fixing your hiring mistakes is 100 times what it costs to train your team to use a standard hiring and promotion process. Think about it—there's just no way to consistently hire and retain the best employees if the process for selecting them is poorly developed and disjointed.

1. Start with an Efficient Communication Flow. The typical organization takes part in an inefficient communication exchange. HR creates the position description without discussing many specifics with the hiring manager and then acts as the gateway for resumes to reach the hiring manager. Right idea, wrong order.

Optimal communication flow begins with information about the job description being thoroughly discussed between HR and the hiring manager. Information flows to potential candidates

after all of the details are panned out. From here, candidates submit information back to HR and the selection team which passes qualified candidates to the hiring manager.

By organizing all the information that is relative to an open position before collecting resumes, your team achieves an overall understanding of the position/opportunity. Team members are well organized and prepared to act in unison. Then, when resumes start coming, they are from the most qualified candidates and can be better assessed by the team as a whole.

2. Pick the Right Hiring Team. Deciding who exactly should be on your selection team can be tough. The people you choose should be qualified to help you make a good selection and capable of making a good impression on the top caliber talent you're going to be interviewing.

Members of the selection team may include the hiring manager, the human resources manager, the hiring manager's direct supervisor and most trusted peers, a top level leadership executive and a top level human resources executive. You should even include the most valued peers who will work closely with the new hire and the most valued employees reporting to the new hire.

Bear in mind that not all members will be part of each step of the interview process. In fact, they may only play a role in one stage of the process. For example, the CEO does not need to participate in the "getting to know you" stage of a round one interview. Likewise, peer interviewers do not need to be included in the final round since they will have already met and interviewed the candidate. The key is to find the right balance between including the right people and as many as are realistically possible.

3. Align Expectations to Prepare the Team. It can be challenging to get very busy HR people and hiring managers to stop what they typically do to launch a search, and rewire them to align the hiring team before the search process

actually starts. Once they understand the benefits from investing about 30 minutes to get into alignment, rarely do they complain or skip this process.

Begin preparing the team by sharing an "Aligning Expectations" document, which typically includes items for the team to discuss and agree upon. It is simply an outline that improves communication and keeps everyone on task during (ideally) a face-to-face meeting or (at least) a telephone conference call.

Here are a few examples of the discussion items that can be included:

1. How will the hiring team represent the organization, culture, hiring manager, and the roles and responsibilities of the position?
2. Discuss the timeliness of updates and follow-up. Will the updates be weekly, bi-weekly, etc.?
3. Discuss timeframe for the selection of the candidate. When will the first slate of candidates be delivered?

This meeting ensures that everyone is prepared to work as an aligned team during the entire selection process. Each member gains clarity on his own personal role, the roles of each of the fellow selection team members, and the role of the team as a whole. A basic agenda for an expectations meeting includes:

1. Review the aligning expectations document—10 minutes.
2. Question and answer time—15 minutes.
3. Agree on expectations and set timelines for moving forward—5 minutes.
4. Gather Pertinent Information. The first step to gathering information is a thorough evaluation of the position description to determine what needs more detail, more explanation, and what information is completely missing.

Follow this by answering basic questions from a Search Prep Questionnaire (Ropella's typically has more than 60 questions) on a range of subjects which can help you understand everything needed to successfully fill the position.

Remember that completing the information gathering process should be collaborative. It's important to include any influencer that is going to participate in the interviews and selection process.

You'll be surprised at how many different answers you'll get from the same question when you allow everyone on the selection team to voice an opinion. And therein lies the greatest advantage of conducting this process: by going through the information gathering process you're getting all of those surprises on the table up front. It's important to resolve surprises, challenges, and disagreements before looking at a single resume and especially before you are face-to-face with candidates performing interviews. These are key elements in hardwiring an effective and efficient hiring process.