Get the Right People on Your Bus

While the U.S. unemployment rate declined to 3.9% in December 2021, many managers and leaders feel an increasing urgency to fill open positions. And it's understandable: short-staffed teams are at greater risk for disengagement, errors, and burnout. So, it's not uncommon to see new-hire incentives including signing bonuses, flex work schedules, and childcare grants.

Unfortunately, filling open positions with the wrong person can make matters worse. When this topic comes up with leaders and managers, I hear about the impact to efficiency and productivity, client trust, and the triple-bottom line.

Instead of hiring the wrong person, great leaders improve their recruitment efforts, discernment in talent selection, and development (and support) of their existing talent pool.

The Pressure to Hire

Even in the best of times, getting the right people on the bus is a persistent challenge for leaders and managers. After all, talent is a critical driver of corporate performance. Consider the factors that greatly influenced the past two decades:

- The irreversible shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age: an average of 1.9 million new knowledge workers was needed every year.

- Intensifying demand for top-performing managers

- Drop in the number of workers ages 20-54: in the U.S., this was 10 million fewer than anticipated from 2000 – 2020.

- Ability to search for and find other positions (switching from company to company)

- Ongoing earnings inequality

A Message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?

- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?

- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization's bottom-line?

- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?

- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?

In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that "*what got you here may not get you there.*"

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Proffitt Management Solutions
326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL
www.ProffittManagement.com
561-582-6060

info@proffittmanagement.com

As a result, managers often feel pressured to hire, even if it is not the right fit. This contributes to hiring mistakes, attrition, and increased expenses. It also impacts the organization's potential managerial and leadership talent pool. Leaders and managers need to get the right people on the bus from the start.

Avoid These Hiring Mistakes

As a leader, what is your strategy to fill open positions during an "employee market"? How do you avoid hiring mistakes?

This is a frequent topic of discussion right now, especially as it falls upon new managers to fill other open—and often critical—positions. But let me ask: What is the hiring success rate for your managers? How did they manage bad decisions? What about you?

When an organization succumbs to the pressure of filling management positions with a poor fit, everyone suffers. Finding the right manager is critical. It requires enough time and energy; it requires a reliable process.

The Process Problem

The biggest hiring mistake is failing to establish a reliable hiring process.

Even in the best of times, managers report that the hiring process is time consuming and often frustrating. This leads to a negative bias, and an increased risk of impulsive hiring. Eager, energetic, and articulate candidates become more attractive when hiring decisions rely too heavily on interview impressions and intuition.

Consider the 85 years of data collected and analyzed by Frank L. Schmidt and John E. Hunter. Their research reveals that employment interviews are only 57% accurate when it comes to getting the right people on the bus. This is only slightly better than a coin toss.

Instead, great leaders develop a process tailored for their organization and culture. They commonly assess candidates on intelligence, work sample (results portfolio or work sample test), integrity test (conscientiousness), and structured interviews.

More than ever it is important to assess candidates for motivation and attitude, emotional intelligence, and the ability to manage stress. Work habits, leadership and team skills, ability to learn and adapt, and many other intangibles contribute to performance and success.

However, before testing and interviewing can take place, it is critical to understand the *real* performance requirements. What does the job entail? Why did the last person leave?

Selecting the wrong candidate will inevitably create more issues. This is the time to review, and if necessary, update job descriptions. It's important to know what you are looking for.

The Best Job Descriptions

The best job descriptions reflect what needs to get done today, and in the near future. Savvy leaders and managers also focus on the behavior and traits necessary to achieve desired results. They consider how the role:

1. **Solves** current and future anticipated business challenges/needs.

2. **Impacts** (affects/interacts/collaborates) other teams, departments, lines of business.

3. **Benefits** from specific competencies and traits.

For example, a combination of four key traits has the greatest impact on workplace teams, according to a recent article in *Harvard Business Review* (December 2021). These include:

- **Reliability**: Flexibility only goes so far if an employee is unreliable. The job description may indicate the ability to manage unexpected events.

- **Readiness**: Prior training and experience may indicate job-readiness, but not always. A growth mindset may be just as important.

- **Attitude**: Those who practice positivity at work are more efficient, productive, and supportive of team members. Attitudes are contagious.

- **Communication**: Whether the position is face-to-face, virtual, or both, the ability to communicate is important. Look for clarity, coherence, and comprehension.

Performance & Outcome

If the past two years has taught us anything, it's the importance of flexibility and adaptability. Almost every manager and employee can share a story about going above and beyond a title, role, or expected tasks. Skills and abilities have been tested, strengthened, and expanded.

However, what got us here may not get us there. If a job description indicates required education and/or years of experience rather than a measurable objective, it is outdated. Sure, experience and skills

are important. But an outcome-oriented job description is a better predictor of future performance. For example, "reduce operating expenses by 9% within the first six months" emphasizes performance and potential and provides measurable objectives.

Talent Attraction and Management

Even in the best of times, the majority of businesses do not prioritize talent management. As a result, attrition rates rise and performance suffers. Talent management is, and will continue to be, a major competitive advantage in the coming years. That's why high-performing companies have a talent mindset: they believe in the importance of talent and take action to strengthen their talent pool.

Talented, high performers may expect top-pay and perks, but they need to believe in and feel passionate about what they are doing. They are looking for a way to create something of value, meaning, and often scale. Over the past two decades, creative freedom was a priority for many; today it is the balance of freedom and safety. Attracting top talent requires the right messaging.

One way to evaluate this is to review your Employee Value Proposition (EVP). Is it a real summary of your employee experience as a part of your organization? Does it truly reflect the culture, values, work satisfaction, leadership, compensation, and more? How do you know this?

Employee Survey

Now may be the time to conduct a formal survey and ask your employees how closely your EVP reflects their experience. In addition, ask what they value. You can offer options and/or write in answers, and ask them to rank in importance.

For example, top performing managers often report that they value:

- Exciting work

- A value-drive culture

- Great leaders in a great company

- Incentives and rewards

- Opportunities for growth, development, and advancement

- The ability (and support) to meet personal and family commitments.

Ask what they would change:

- How could their work experience improve?

- What about the organization?

Keep your survey as short and simple as possible, and start with why: how you will use the information to improve their work experience. Follow-up with the results of your survey and any action (next steps) you will take.

Talent management is about attracting, hiring, and retaining the best people and *making this a high priority*.

Retain Top Talent

Leaders and managers must keep their team members actively engaged. They must monitor tasks, conditions, and outcomes and their relationship to roles, responsibilities, and strengths. Providing optimal working conditions becomes a more crucial responsibility.

To support your employees and keep them engaged:

- **Communicate**: Provide status updates and opportunities for real-time dialog. While email, text, and meetings are important, make time to connect in one-on-one conversations. All serve to strengthen interpersonal bonds.

- **Consider support strategies**: Help people "play" at work, develop strengths to achieve mastery of their work, and ways to reward their efforts and results.

- **Re-examine roles and responsibilities**: Consider if/how to create new/different/temp/AI positions), or hire for a different position.

Retention and engagement often go hand-in-hand. To help people engage, evaluate the alignment of their strengths and tasks. Do they enjoy their work? Is it too easy, or too difficult? Why? As a manager, what are you doing to address this?

Every employee should feel recognized and valued for what they do. While they may learn from their mistakes, they grow even more when their successes are noticed and praised. Recognize achievements, efforts, and attitudes. Praise the small wins, and the big victories follow.

Many factors cause disengagement, but the most prevalent is feeling overwhelmed—physically, mentally, or emotionally. You see, our level of engagement depends on how we feel: optimistic, grateful, autonomous, able, hopeful, supported. We need to feel true appreciation.

Proffitt Management
Solutions
326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL
33405
561-582-6060