
C H A P T E R

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Assume the Proper Mind-Set

Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline.

—Jim Collins

Get ready—because whether this is your first hire or your 150th, whether you’re hiring a chief financial officer (CFO) or an accounts payable clerk, a salesperson or an information technology (IT) manager, a mail clerk or a chief information officer (CIO)—*all hires count*. A great hire will keep your organization profitable, growing and happy, whereas a poor hire will drain your company of morale, time, and profits. Hiring directly and indirectly affects your bottom line. You need to keep that top of mind as we explore the five components of the proper mind-set.

Sticky Notes:

- Nothing is more important than hiring the right people.
- Guard against believing you’re a great judge of people.
- Hiring great people requires discipline.
- Implementing the MATCH process will dramatically impact your bottom line.

1. Make hiring your main concern.

Prioritize hiring—consider it as your most critical activity until it’s complete. You generally do well at those things you prioritize, so do the same for this activity.

Need a little boost of inspiration before we get into all the details of the MATCH process? Let’s look at a couple of quotes. I consider these thoughts to constitute the basis of the proper mind-set you’ll need to hire at the 95+ percent success rate:

From Jack Welch:

Hiring good people is hard. Hiring great people is brutally hard. And yet nothing matters more in winning than getting the right people on the field.

From Peter Drucker:

People decisions are the ultimate—perhaps the only—control of an organization. People determine the performance capacity of an organization. No organization can do better than the people it has. The yield from the human resource really determines the organization's performance. And that's decided by the basic people decisions: whom we hire and whom we fire, where we place people, and whom we promote. The quality of these human decisions largely determines whether the organization is being run seriously, whether its mission, its values, and its objectives are real and meaningful to people, rather than just public relations and rhetoric.

In a practical sense, preparing to make a hire—*especially* if hiring is not your main responsibility—means that you must treat the process as a critical-path project. Plan hiring activities as if they were meetings on your calendar, and stick to your commitments. To the degree possible, gear down on other projects until you're through with hiring. If nothing else, prioritize this hire on the same level as your most pressing project. Get serious about it—your company's well-being is riding on it!

2. Stop believing you're a "great judge of people."

Ouch. I know; this one can hurt. I mean, who doesn't think they're at least a *decent* judge of people? I myself have participated in literally thousands of hiring decisions. I'm usually able to spot talent and nuances and potential issues that never even occur to the average executive involved in hiring. However, whenever I begin to get full of myself for being so "people savvy," I'm reminded of another Peter Drucker quote:

"Any executive who starts out believing that he or she is a good judge of people is going to end up making the worst

decisions. To be a judge of people is not a power given to mere mortals. Those who have a batting average of almost a thousand in such decisions start out with a very simple premise: that they are not judges of people. . . . An executive, too, has to learn not to depend on insight and knowledge of people but on a mundane, boring, and conscientious step-by-step process.”

So, take it from Mr. Drucker and do your best to suspend personal judgment. Though it may sound harsh, what you consider “being a good judge of people” is often just a case of mild narcissism. We humans tend to connect with people similar to us. That’s natural, and it even has a place in the hiring process. However, you must be very careful not to subconsciously cut a favored candidate a break when deciding if they fit the position’s requirements. Stick to the parameters you’ve set for the role instead of re-creating the position to fit their strengths.

When you’re given an employee to manage, you must play to their strengths; when you hire a person, stick to your requirements as closely as possible. If a person doesn’t exactly fit the bill, but you believe that he or she would make a valuable hire, step away and reevaluate the hire. Will you be sacrificing payroll dollars and achieving only half your objective, or will this person bring value in other areas? What I am advocating is that you go into the hire with your eyes wide open—not swayed by personality dynamics.

A CEO and friend of mine hired a public relations (PR) manager a few years ago. This CEO really “liked” this new employee; they’d definitely clicked during the interview. There was just one hiccup: the PR manager hated talking to the press. She had gotten burned with bad exposure a few times in a previous job, and as a result, she focused almost exclusively on writing, a medium with which she felt very comfortable. In terms of meeting business objectives for the company—in this case, increasing brand awareness—she was only doing half of the job.

If my CEO friend had been looking for a PR manager that specialized exclusively in writing, he would have hired the right person. Unfortunately, his organization needed expertise

in both writing and talking to the press. Even with coaching, the hire wound up being a disaster. My friend was unhappy, and the PR manager wound up resigning.

Deciding if a person can actually *do* the job requires detaching yourself in an almost scientific, objective manner and working through a defined process. Had the CEO followed this process, he would have discovered this shortcoming in the PR manager. At that point he could have either rewritten the job description or made the decision to continue the search for a PR manager with strengths in both writing *and* communicating to the press.

When most people hear the phrase “hiring the wrong person,” they think of the oddball who doesn’t fit in with the office culture, or complains all the time, or is chronically late. Yes, clearly, those are signs of a bad hire and poor judgment by the hiring team. However, what many people do not consider is that a poor hire can also be the person who *does* fit in with the team, is optimistic and on time, but who doesn’t help fulfill business objectives. They do work that “fits their personality” rather than the work that *needs* to be done to keep you growing and profitable. Following a systematic process helps you avoid this uncomfortable situation.

A formal hiring process allows a company to become objective in its hiring, which is critical:

- **If *you’re* the one making the decision.** Face it—we all have biases, and we all have blind spots. If you’re in charge of this hiring decision, your credibility with the rest of your staff is on the line. You must have a way of removing your objectivity from the process so that you can make the best decision possible.
- **If *you’re* one member of a team that’s making the decision.** The team must work from a common perspective to make sure all the bases are covered and that each member knows his or her role. Those parts must complement each other so that when decision time comes, everyone is working from the same set of criteria.

3. Commit to the MATCH process.

Okay, now you have an inkling of what you're in for. I'm going to lay out the hiring process for you, task by task. If followed properly, this process will get you as close to a 100 percent success rate as possible. And yes, it is mundane. It takes discipline, and it takes time that you don't think you have. And if you shortcut the process—if you cherry-pick certain tasks and ignore others—you *will* get burned.

If one of the new recruiters in my firm gets in a slump, we review their compliance with this process in detail. I invariably find that they're shortcutting some task because they think it's (pick one) *tough to do/time consuming/boring/unnecessary*. Once corrected, however, they perform better, and they become more committed to the entire process.

While the process is demanding, it doesn't require superhuman talent to carry out. What it requires more than anything is for you to make hiring the best people your priority. The process also requires a little bit of faith—at least the first time through—to see how the whole thing comes together and how the latter steps are affected by the earlier steps. And remember, I'll help you through it. I've been through this process thousands of times, and have seen great things happen as a result.

4. Suspend your gut instincts.

The biggest blind spot hiring managers have in our recruiting experience is that they believe that their "intuition" will guide them to the correct hire. They look at a strict process as being "cold," time consuming, or just not worth the effort. They'll often cherry-pick parts of the process—the ones that make sense and/or are easy for them—and avoid the more uncomfortable or difficult steps.

Entrepreneurs are especially susceptible to making bad hiring decisions. For one thing, they're insanely busy. For another, their "gut" has gotten them where they are today. Many times their success has been due in part to their ability to make a leap (or several leaps) of faith.

Why doesn't that leap of faith work in the hiring process? Well, the words *leap* and *faith* might be a clue! But all kidding

aside—the reason you must follow a strict process is that it’s the best way to keep you aligned with your business mission, and aligning with your business mission keeps you profitable. At the end of the day—even if you’re *completely* comfortable with the person you hired—you’re in trouble if they cannot fulfill your business objectives within the framework of your mission.

By the way, note that I am advocating that you *suspend* your gut instincts, not *ignore*. Over years of observation I have noted that your intuition will actually play a role in the final decision. By sticking to the process as objectively as you can, you will be feeding your instincts consistent and clear information, which will lessen your inner conflicts and make your decision that much easier.

5. Ponder the bigger picture.

If you’ve taken the time to read thus far about putting yourself in the proper mind-set, I should probably get right to the point: the hiring process, when done correctly, hurts. It *should* hurt, and it should be sort of boring. I say that, and I’m an executive recruiter! That’s all right, though, because I know two essential things about hiring:

- When it’s done right and you find the right person—a person who matches the skills needed and the culture of your company—that is a *beautiful* thing; and I don’t use the word *beautiful* lightly. I have seen individuals, departments, and whole companies transformed as a result of placing the right people in the right roles. Now let’s go a little bigger in scope—consider the effect of a productive, satisfied person on his or her family, community, and even the economy. The ripple effect can be enormous. Yes, a beautiful thing indeed.
- On the other hand, the cost of a mishire can be staggering—up to 13 times that person’s salary. Oh, we all have a story, don’t we? If you want to read mine, see Appendix III for the story of the Bad Controller. The *literal* costs to the company of a controller hired for two years, who turned out to be a mishire, were easily over \$1.5 million. And that figure was just for *that one person*. What if they had hired others just

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like them? What about the good people who quit because they couldn't stand the guy? Yes, there's a ripple effect here, too. What about loss of department morale? Bad press? Angry customers? Getting the new person up to speed? You get the picture.

If you find the MATCH process tedious, focus on results—they will be far from boring. Done correctly, this hiring structure will impact your company in a positive way—from a multimillion-dollar impact on your bottom line to a happier, more productive team.

So, with hopes that I have caught your attention—onward we go.