

Making the Connection

Tips On How To Successfully Select, Hire and Retain Employees

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There are several key components that will need to coalesce to make a successful hire. First, a hiring manager needs to successfully attract, select, and hire the right candidate. Once the candidate has been hired, not only does the candidate have to live up to the hiring company's expectations, but in order to turn that new hire into a lasting employee, the company has to live up to the new hire's expectations as well. The company must then develop the new employee and assess their success. Finally, once the candidate has settled into his or her position, the company must retain that new employee and ensure they are successful.

The first step in the process of finding the right candidate begins with communication. The hiring manager must make sure that everyone affected by the hire is in agreement with the job description, specific responsibilities and the skills required. Hiring managers should ask these key questions: Does everyone in the group understand how the new hire impacts their work? Do my superiors agree with the requirements for the open position? Is the Human Resources liaison aware of what the hiring manager is looking for? Finally, if the open position is a management role, do the employees that will report to this person know what they are looking for in a manager? Once the hiring manager has spoken with and gathered information from all of these parties, it will be easier to write a thorough and effective job description.

A job description should include the critical requirements and experience that a candidate must possess in order to be considered for the opening as well as a summary of key responsibilities. It is crucial to write a fresh job description for every opening and keep it clear and concise. If there are too many requirements, it may discourage the right candidate from applying. A great job description identifies not only the critical experience necessary, but also the skills that would be considered "nice to have."

Once the job description has been written and approved, it is time to post the opening on the proper websites and search engines. Of course, the first posting is going to be on the company website. Many candidates "follow companies" and regularly check industry specific news as well as the websites of companies that interest them. If these potential candidates see an opening that is appropriate for their background, they may apply directly. This is a great situation because the candidate is not only interested in the specific position posted, but also in the company itself. Company website job postings are also easy to maintain and keep track of because they are filtered into the corporate database.

A company may also want to post the opening on appropriate and popular job boards. Search engines can be a good resource in generating large volumes of candidates. If the opening is entry-level, these job sites can be quite helpful by often giving a hiring manager an enormous amount of interested, and often relevant, candidates. But when looking for senior level candidates, these sites can often be frustrating and time consuming. Because there are going to be a huge number of applicants who are not appropriate for the job, rifling through masses of resumes often requires more of a time commitment than many hiring managers in the pharmaceutical industry have the ability to give. Since senior level job descriptions are extremely specific in terms of years of experience, and contain multiple experience requirements, searching or counting on job boards to produce the perfect candidate is almost like “finding a needle in a haystack.”

While posting an opening on major job boards can be positive and helpful dependant on the level, it does not address the problem of how to attract potential candidates that are not actively looking for new opportunities. These types of candidates are many times the most valuable, as they are usually happy where they are, and are only willing to leave for the perfect opportunity. There are two approaches to finding candidates that are not applying on-line.

The first approach may seem very obvious, but is sometimes taken for granted. Before sourcing in any other way, smart hiring managers always do internal sourcing first. Hiring from within the company is always a great option that should never be overlooked. There are two reasons that hiring within is beneficial: First, hiring from within the company reduces the learning curve significantly. Many times a candidate’s ability to fit in to a company’s corporate culture becomes a big part of the reason for hiring them. When a candidate comes from within, it is apparent that he or she will have the right personality to work within the organization. Second, hiring internally is also a great tool in retaining current employees. Before posting a job externally, hiring managers should consider all of the employees within the group and envision them in the role trying to be filled. When managers pass over current employees and choose to hire from outside rather than promote from within, the employees passed over may become frustrated and therefore look for opportunities for advancement elsewhere. If there are no appropriate candidates in the group, be sure to consider other parts of the company where qualified candidates might exist. Bottom line, hiring managers should work with the appropriate Human Resources partner to make sure that the opening is properly marketed internally.

The second approach to finding candidates not necessarily on the market is networking. Hiring managers should reflect back on previous work experiences and colleagues to see if there is anyone that sticks out that could be a good fit for the position. This is where keeping an active network can pay off. Contacting old colleagues, professors, managers, and friends can lead to referrals and potentially the perfect candidate. Tasking the entire team to network can also help uncover the right candidate. Hiring a known commodity has its advantages because people within the company are already aware of their strengths as well as the areas where they will need development and mentoring. The “inside scoop,” is invaluable.

If internal sourcing and networking does not work, using a recruiter is another viable option, especially if the opening is a senior role. There are several reasons why recruiters are beneficial to companies. The recruiter does all of the filtering before submitting resumes. When a hiring manager receives a resume, the candidate has already been qualified in terms of having the appropriate background and interest in the position. This saves time and allows human resources to focus on other important tasks. Recruiters are also able to identify and attract candidates that are not even looking for a job. These are candidates that would never have known about the opening because they are not going to company websites nor are they looking at job postings on the Internet. PharmaLogics Recruiting estimates that roughly nine out of ten people that accept new jobs in the pharmaceutical industry are not actively looking for new opportunities. Recruiters are also able to provide the company with information about the candidate that a company would not be able to find out on their own, with regard to relocation concerns, salary expectations, etc. Good recruiters have wonderful relationships with their candidates, spending hours of time getting to know them. The information recruiters have about candidates is often information that ultimately determines if the candidate will not only receive an offer from a company, but ultimately accept an offer from them.

Hiring managers should keep in mind that finding the right recruiter is important. They should look for a recruiter that specializes in the same area for which he or she has an opening. Many recruiters are generalists and try to be a “one stop shop” for every kind of opening and, this defeats the purpose of using a recruiter at all. These types of recruiters cannot effectively screen candidates for the opening because it is likely that they do not fully understand the requirements themselves. For instance, if the opening is in chemistry, then find a recruiter that only specializes in chemistry placements. It not only ensures a smooth hiring process, but also a successful placement in a much shorter amount of time.

Once the “specialized” recruiter is identified, be very specific with what skills are important for the position.

For example:

Do not say: “I am looking for someone with good technical skills”

Do say: “ I am looking for someone who understands Hits to Lead”

Specific details will help the recruiter narrow down the search to only the most qualified and relevant candidates. The hiring manager should also arm the recruiter with relevant selling points for both the position and the company. Remember, the best recruiters are going to proactively approach candidates who are not advertising their desire for a new position. Equipping the recruiter with strong, “selling points” as to why the organization is a great company to work for is a great resource. Also a detailed job description, facts about the group, and tidbits on the opportunity itself (i.e. size of the group, advancement opportunities, management responsibility, etc), help the recruiter paint a vivid picture to potential candidates. Once this is accomplished, the hiring manager can

sit back and relax and only worry about choosing among all of the highly qualified resumes that are sent directly to his or her attention.

Now that the methods for gathering appropriate resumes have been established, it is imperative to consider the issue of timing in the process. Timing is everything when it comes to recruiting. It is not possible for a company to move too quickly through the interview process. The bottom line is that great candidates are not on the market very long and if, “you snooze you lose.” When going through the interview process, it is important to be mindful of how long each step takes. Here are some examples of common mistakes regarding timing that need to be avoided:

- 1) Conducting phone interviews with **all** of the candidates before inviting anyone in for a formal interview. Once a successful phone interview has occurred, it is good practice to extend an invitation for an onsite interview immediately. Do not wait until all of the phone interviews have been completed to express continued interest in any one candidate. Inviting someone in for an interview establishes that the candidate is qualified and goes a long way towards keeping the candidate’s interest level high. If a company waits too long after the phone interview to invite a candidate in, it can send a message to him or her that perhaps they did not meet the company’s expectations. It can also reflect poorly on the organization’s ability to make decisions. Remember that the candidate is evaluating their desire to work for the company throughout this process as well.
- 2) Waiting too long after a successful interview to move to the offer stage. If a candidate comes in for a formal interview, and a week goes by with no word of interest after the interview, the likelihood of getting the candidate on board dwindles significantly. Prepare all of the members of the interview team to give their feedback immediately after the candidate leaves. It often makes sense to schedule a debrief meeting to go over the positives and potential question marks of each candidate while the interview is fresh in everyone’s mind. Remember that the hiring manager is responsible for driving the interview process to completion. If it does take longer than a week for an offer to be presented, be sure someone is communicating with the candidate in the interim to keep them informed of the process as well as to keep their interest level high. This communication should come from the hiring manager, the Human Resource representative or the recruiter.
- 3) Many companies establish a minimum number of candidates that need to be interviewed before proceeding to the offer stage. While it is helpful to make comparisons amongst multiple candidates, be mindful that the first candidate may be the best. Again, timing is key. Do not risk losing the ideal candidate simply for the sake of meeting a pre-determined number of applicants.

Now that some timing mistakes have been identified, the actual interview process is the next crucial step. The first step is to conduct a phone interview with out of town candidates or have a casual lunch with those that are local. Once the phone screen or

lunch is complete, a formal face-to-face interview is the next step. If the candidate is coming in from out of town it is a good idea to have them in the night before and meet them at their hotel for dinner. This gives the candidate a sign that the company is thankful that they have taken time off to interview, and this is a great way to welcome them to the area. It also gives the hiring manager a chance to meet the candidate in a relaxed environment which leads to a better understanding of their personality and how they can fit into the group.

The actual face-to-face interview should be an efficient process as well. Whenever possible, aim to complete the process in one full day, as opposed to conducting a second round interview. Even if the candidate is local, they have likely taken at least one day off of work for the meeting. Completing the process in one day as opposed to breaking it up into multiple interviews is more efficient and cost effective for everyone involved. If given the choice, most candidates prefer interviewing on a Friday or a Monday, because it is easier to justify taking time off from work. This also helps with out of town candidates as it allows them the opportunity to come a day earlier or stay a day later to look around, see the city and get a sense of the housing that is available. Companies should support candidates spending additional time in the area, as it becomes important if they will be interviewing on site only once. Furthermore, it is less expensive to book an additional night in the hotel, as opposed to flying them in a second time.

When the interview day arrives, the hiring manager must make sure that all of the members of the interview team are prepared. He or she is responsible for making sure everyone has reviewed the CV, thought of appropriate questions, and understands the job description and the challenges of the open position. The hiring manager needs to assign someone to give the candidate a tour of the facility. Someone should also be tasked with discussing the benefits of working with the company, potential growth opportunities, health coverage, and how and when bonuses are paid. When an interview runs smoothly it reflects positively on the hiring manager and more importantly, the entire company. Conversely, there is nothing more frustrating for a candidate than showing up in someone's office for an interview and realizing that the person is reading their CV for the first time. It is also unprofessional to make candidates wait longer than a few minutes for someone on the interview schedule to arrive. The interviewing team should be aware of the schedule and agree to stick with it as closely as possible.

Once feedback has been gathered and the interest level has been established, it is time to move on to references. This should only be done after the completion of an interview, and when it has been determined that an offer is likely to be made to the candidate. The practice of "backdoor" reference checking is not professional and should be avoided. Any candidate that comes in for an interview is making a confidential inquiry into a position. This is a vulnerable time for the candidate, as he or she does not want people to know that they are looking at other opportunities. Conducting a "backdoor" reference check jeopardizes that confidentiality because references are usually colleagues, former managers, and professors. It is well known that people talk and the pharmaceutical world is a very small! If there are any questions about what is or is not appropriate regarding reference checks, hiring managers should consult their Human Resources department.

Once the hiring manager and the rest of the team have identified the candidate of choice and references have been checked, the important offer stage follows. This crucial stage can be exciting as well as stressful. If the company has communicated with the candidate effectively, executed the interview in a timely manner, and been honest with the candidate throughout the entire process, there should be no question that the offer and acceptance will come hand in hand. An offer is comprised of several different components. The base salary is the most important ingredient. On average, an offer includes a 5-15% increase over the candidate's current salary (this does not include cost of living adjustments for relocated candidates). Remember to account for any annual bonus as well. A good rule of thumb is to offer the candidate an increase in both base salary and total compensation. Additionally, a sign-on bonus is a great tool to use when the base salary cannot meet the candidate's expectations.

Relocation is another factor that demands careful consideration. There are many different components that can go into a relocation package. These components need to be established before the offer stage. Some important costs to consider are: the cost of the actual move, closing costs on each end, temporary housing, etc. If the company offers a lump sum to cover all of the moving costs, it is important to make sure the tax ramifications of the lump sum are considered.

If a company can understand a candidate's expectations and a candidate can understand the company's limitations, a negotiation should be successful. Once the offer letter is sent out, a hiring manager should always follow up to answer any questions.

The job as a hiring manager is not over once the candidate has been hired. It is time to ensure that the company lives up to the candidate's expectations and the candidate successfully meets the needs of the job. The first step in ensuring that both will happen is setting goals and expectations for the new employee. Making a list of goals for the first six months as well as for the first year is an excellent start. The hiring manager should then discuss each goal with the new employee so he or she fully understands what is expected of them. Employees should know that an evaluation will be based on the success of accomplishing the goals that are outlined. It is also good practice to allow the new employee to write out a list of their expectations and personal goals. This will ensure that the new employee will be focused with firm goals in mind, as well as informing their hiring manager of what is important to them. For instance, if a hiring manager is aware that gaining experience in HPLC is something the employee desires to strive for, an opportunity may arise or be created that could facilitate the achievement of this personal goal.

Rewarding employees is an essential and excellent tool for retention. Many people think of rewards as monetary or tangible in some way, but non-tangible rewards are equally, if not more, important. There are two main reasons why employees either stay with their company or, conversely, choose to leave. The first is whether they have positive or negative feelings about their manager. The second is whether or not the employee feels there is growth potential within the company. It is interesting to note that neither of these reasons is related to money. Employees like to be recognized in front of their

peers. A simple word of thanks or congratulations for their particular effort goes a long way. Here are two examples of how to incorporate non-tangible rewards:

Year-End Congratulations

What if at the end of the year, each employee received a list of all of things their hiring manager felt they accomplished and were doing exceptionally well on? What if this were posted publicly so everyone else would know how valuable each individual is to the company? How would this make employees feel? This goes beyond the yearly review because this is a simple recognition of only the positive contributions that person has made to the group. (Interesting idea, but I am not sure how well it would work in reality.)

Creation of Personal Path Forward

People want to feel like they have a place to go within an organization. They want to know that there is a 2 or 5-year plan in mind for them, but they also want to feel that this plan is flexible to include what they hope to do, and not what will be dictated for them to do. This applies to both the Research Associate and the Director of the Department. At every year's end, each employee should be asked what they hope to achieve over the course of the next upcoming year. The hiring manager should ask them what they are looking for in a 2-year plan. Although, not all of the employees' expectations are going to be met, giving them a path forward that accommodates some of what they are expecting is a great start. This will go a long way in giving the employee a feeling that the company supports their professional growth. A hiring manager might even learn a thing or two about new ways an employee can contribute to the organization.

In conclusion, successfully selecting, hiring, and retaining the right candidate is a multi-step process that every company should master and take seriously. Companies that practice good hiring techniques and maintain a healthy and positive work place, will retain employees and make a "positive" connection with each individual they hire. It is the pharmaceutical companies following these practices that engage more qualified candidates and ultimately are able to hire the best chemists in the world. Because this industry is reliant on the capability and success of the scientists themselves, having a strategy to successfully attract, select and retain those scientists is essential, and it all begins with making a successful connection.