

Three of the most common hiring mistakes in a small business (and how to avoid them)

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22 Sep 2023

Small business owners must understand how to go about hiring the right people, in order to build teams that can get the job done, in the correct way and within the right time frame. Although every startup has different requirements in terms of the kind of people and expertise it needs to get off the ground and be a success, there are a few basic guidelines that should be followed when it comes to the hiring process, and how to avoid hiring the wrong talent.

The below three most common hiring blunders may help you sidestep some of the pitfalls involved with onboarding employees and set you on the right path to building a winning team who will take your business from strength to strength.

Hiring for competence and culture

In the past, finding the right person for the job was a relatively siloed process in the sense that talent managers and recruiters looked for people who were an exact fit against a specific set of criteria. But more recently, research has shown that cultural fit is just as important as competence, which is something not every business considers.

Skills can be learnt and developed over time, whereas aspects such as character, agreeableness and relatability are linked to who people really are as individuals. Even the most qualified employee can weigh a team down if their attitude and mindset is not aligned with the business' vision and long-term objectives.

To avoid overlooking the importance of a cultural fit, ask interview questions that relate to the candidate's personal and professional values, their work ethic, the way they relate to other people and the world around them, and their goals for the future.

A white paper published by the Robert Walters specialist recruitment company found that almost 80% of employers believe that a cultural fit should be a key determinant when hiring someone. On the other hand, the same study found that 70% of working professionals have left a job due to experiencing a poor cultural fit. This research not only highlights the importance of keeping culture in mind for the sake of the existing team, but also as a way of optimising employee retention.

A rushed job

The urgency you may feel in needing to fill a vacancy may cloud your judgement when it comes to finding the right person. Taking your time to recruit and critically screen candidates for a small business is an important process that can have a profound impact on your company's success. While it may be tempting to choose someone for the job because the role is open and ready to be filled, choosing the wrong person could cost you more in the long run. By taking your time to evaluate candidates, you can run all-important background checks, test the candidates' abilities with trial tasks and get to know more about what they envision for their career and see if it aligns with what your business can offer.

To solve the problem of urgency, you could consider hiring an independent contractor or freelancer who can fill the gap until you find the right person. A study conducted by LinkedIn found that as much as 80% of companies hire contractors as part of their teams, to complement the full-time workforce or address temporary needs or vacancies.

Don't make it a tick-box exercise



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While you may have a list of requirements for the ideal candidate, thinking too much 'inside of the box' can end up narrowing your growth horizons. Sometimes the best people for the job aren't those who are an exact fit, according to the specifications you provide. Sometimes, they can offer a skill or aptitude that can benefit your business in a way that you may not initially realise.

It's important to have a job specification that you can use to attract talent, but that job description should be a reference point rather than a rigid measure of suitability. Individuals who can demonstrate an appetite for learning and growth, and who are creative thinkers and innovators could very well become vital cogs in your small business' engine. These are the qualities that may not be immediately identifiable but have the ability to transform your business in the long run.

Ideally, as a small business owner, you need to onboard team members who will challenge the status quo and push the boundaries in a positive way. People with those qualities will bring the fresh perspectives you need to build an agile business that can adapt and change as the market evolves. Embracing candidates who may not conform to the traditional mould can also encourage diversity of thought, enrich company culture, and open doors to untapped potential.

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