

# DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SELECTION PROCESS

**“Given the many things that businesses can’t control, from the uncertain state of the economy to the unpredictable actions of competitors, you’d think companies would pay careful attention to the one thing they can control – the quality of their people, especially those in the leadership pool. An organization’s human beings are its most reliable resource for generating excellent results year after year. Their judgments, experiences, and capabilities make the difference between success and failure. (Bossidy, L., & Charan, R. (2002). *EXECUTION: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*. New York, NY: Crown Business).”**

Today, more than ever, it is critical that organizations get it right when it comes to hiring decisions. It seems the message is being heard loud and clear, as the industry trend of conducting an in-depth selection assessment of your critical leaders is becoming more and more prevalent. In this article we’ll explore the vital components of a strong selection process.

First, it is important to have a clear picture of what you are looking for, then you can define your process. We recommend an initial screening for technical competencies. Once you are assured a person is qualified, a two-interview process incorporating your key stakeholders should be next. Interviews should be behaviorally based and linked back to your job analysis. Your top candidates also should include completion of a valid assessment tool and a reference check. Below are some suggestions on each area.

## **Job Analysis**

HR recruiters are often given a job description and asked to find the perfect candidate. Typically that job description isn’t up-to-date, doesn’t include short and long-term objectives/initiatives, and lacks specificity regarding the actual responsibilities of the position. Try this for fun: remove the title of three key executive job descriptions, close your eyes and mix them up. Then, try to figure out which one is associated with which role. All too often they focus heavily on the basic requirements of any leader within your organization. The job description is not sufficient for conducting an effective selection process. It is important to interview the key constituents of the position and assemble a list of technical and behavioral requirements. Validate that what they say they want is truly what they need. Remember the adage that if you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.

## **Screening**

Certain things can be deal-breakers. Be wary of including too many, as this can increase the length of the search unnecessarily. If you have too many, you may

be better served by categorizing as preferred and essential. Really take an honest look at your list of deal-breakers and decide what are the bona fide occupational requirements versus what would be ideal. We ask all our candidates to prove to us they're a good technical match by asking them to include a written list of their accomplishments (not their professionally prepared generic resume) compared to your specific needs.

## **Interview**

How many times have you observed a candidate that interviewed well, but just did not make it when it came to surviving day to day in the actual job? Often, their failure has little to do with their technical competencies and knowledge. More frequently it has to do with their leadership style, personality, and/or fit within your organization's unique culture. Traditional interview processes focus too heavily on whether or not a person can perform the job with little attention paid to whether or not they will want to do the job the way you need them to do it. A selection interview should be behaviorally based and needs to incorporate a well-rounded battery of questions that test both a person's aptitude and desire. The focus needs to be on whether they can accomplish current objectives overcoming existing obstacles and those identified in the future according to your strategic plan. Too often, hires are made in the present without proper thought given to their ability to grow with the position.

The interview should include questions that highlight a person's appropriateness for a role and give you a counter-balance of negative information about that individual so you can make an informed decision. Beware of the perfect candidate that has no shortcomings. We have interviewed thousands of executives and haven't found a perfect one yet. Make sure you don't either. When a candidate tells you they can't think of any weakness, they have just identified one, that being their poor insight into their own strengths and weaknesses. If hired, you'll undoubtedly notice they can't take criticism, are typically unaware that they are not meeting expectations or will have trouble admitting they need help. Interviewing is a learned skill. Invest in training your leaders making the decisions so they are making the right ones.

## **Behavioral Profile**

Industrial Organizational Psychologists will tell you that personality traits are rather constant. That means it is difficult to change what may be the core of an individual. Any effective selection process needs to take this into consideration and test their applicants to know more definitively what they are getting prior to their start date. Just like in dating, you don't ever want to say I'm sure he'll change once we get married. Start dates and weddings are rarely the impetus for personality change. The tool needs to be designed to give you a better understanding of those key traits that an individual must possess for success in your organization.

That being said, it is important to know how to use personality testing. Typically when criticized or litigated, it is the direct result of trying to do something with an assessment tool that it was not designed to do. Consult an expert before incorporating into your process and never use as the sole basis for selection or elimination. Potential areas of concern should always be cross validated by carefully designing additional interview questions to test whether or not it will actually be an issue in the workplace.

### **Reference Checks**

Traditional references are virtually useless. Candidates provide their colleague friends who typically provide little insight, unless probed for additional information. When conducting references, always ask for supporting examples. If they can't provide you an example, then you know to discount the reference, as the person doesn't know them as in-depth as you need. Choose questions that provide insight into the candidate's ability to accomplish your key objectives and how they will fit into your culture. Generic questions get you generic answers.

An effective selection process can take longer and be more work than the traditional one, but can you afford not to? We use the expression "Hire in haste, repent at your leisure." to emphasize that a little extra effort is necessary to ensure that your organization invests wisely in their most important assets – their leaders.