

How to Maximize Your Most Important Asset

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Most companies know that their most important asset is their people, but many companies and organizations pay only “lip service” to proper selection, training, motivation, and management of their people. In this article we are going to focus on effective selection or hiring.

Today’s very tight labor market requires extreme care in making the right hire. The cost of a bad hire is significant. It not only includes the cost of poorly spent payroll dollars, but also opportunity cost, organization upheaval, customer alienation, and other effects of poor decision-making. Cost estimates associated with a bad hire can range from \$10,000 to over \$250,000. Any amount is too much.

In a management role, it is important to not only create culture and values, but also to determine strategy to ensure that the right people are hired for the right positions. Many business owners are disappointed and even panicked when an employee gives notice. Alternatively, management should view an employee’s departure as an opportunity to hire someone who brings more to the company, as an opportunity to increase employee skills and enhance human “asset value.”

In order to do this, consider sending key people to formal training to learn innovative and effective interview techniques to help you only hire qualified people that fit within the company’s culture. Following are important concepts to bring to the interviewing process.

- **Hiring and interviewing is a continuous learning process.** One will never know all there is to know.
- **Resume vs. interview** – A candidate’s resume will tell you if he or she has the basic qualifications, while an interview will tell you so much more, like whether the candidate has the right attitude, soft skills, how they will mesh with your company’s culture and values, etc.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** The purpose of interviewing is to get an honest sense of the person in front of you. If you stick to stock questions, you’ll get stock answers. In order to discover the real individual, ask the unexpected. Throw a few curveballs. Ask open-ended questions, ones that can’t be answered with a yes or no. Be sure to follow each question with another open-ended question to gather a deeper understanding of the candidate’s answer to the initial question. To follow up, start with “How?” “Why?” or “Who?” This will force your candidate to give longer, more thoughtful responses. Following is a list of open-ended interview questions.
- **Don’t begin an interview by doing all of the talking.** Many employers ease into interviews by telling a candidate all about their company. The fact is, you’ll learn much more about a candidate if you launch right into your questions. Tell the candidate “I’m interested in you, and I will answer all of your questions, but first I want to learn about you.” If your candidate is on the ball, he or she will be ready to demonstrate some knowledge of your company. (The Internet has made it very easy to perform background research.) If you don’t provide cues regarding your priorities, your candidate can’t parrot them and will have to state their own ideas.
- **Have the candidate do the questioning.** Before a second or third interview, ask your candidate to submit ten questions about the position or company. The questions will reveal why he or she wants the job: for money, for satisfaction, or for the free coffee.

- **Cut the interview short when necessary.** Should it become clear at any time during an interview that a candidate is not for you, cut the interview short. It doesn't make sense to go through the motions for the sake of being polite. Why waste your or the candidate's time? But always be courteous – every person you touch carries forth an impression of your organization.
- **Exaggerations.** You don't believe everything you hear, do you? It is not uncommon for job applicants to exaggerate and even lie on their resumes and applications. It may shock you to know just how prevalent this practice is. Statistics show that 33 percent of applicants make false claims to prospective employers. Another study puts that number at 54 percent, more than half of all job candidates!
- **Performing background checks** is a good idea, for various reasons. One out of five candidates has some kind of criminal record, something many fail to disclose on their application. While people have a right to a second chance, you have a right to that information. Why put your employees or company risk?
- **Question what's on the resume.** If someone claims to have boosted sales by 10 percent, ask them how they did it, step by step. If it's true, you will know and you can benefit from that information!
- **Always check a candidate's references and verify previous employers.** Try to get past the HR department as it won't give you the kind of information you want. Always ask if there is "anyone else you can talk to." Ideally, you'd like to talk to your candidate's former manager and any coworkers that he or she may have managed. If you can get a dialogue going, you'll have a better sense of who your candidate really is.

The professionals of MichaelSilver work closely with many different types of businesses, and therefore bring a broad perspective regarding compensation and employee motivation concepts to their clients. Working with MichaelSilver will help you not only enhance your people assets, but also your physical and intellectual assets. Please contact us at 847-982-0333 if we can help.

Open-ended Interview Questions

Some of the questions are related to sales and can be modified for any position.

1. Describe a time in your last job when you encountered obstacles while you were in pursuit of a goal. What happened?
2. We have all failed to meet company quota at one time or another. When you don't meet those goals, how do you handle it?
3. Tell me about the most difficult sale you every made.
4. How would your customers describe you?
5. In what areas do you typically have the least amount of patience?
6. How would you grade your ability to communicate with upper management, customers, and peers?
7. Tell me about a time when you and your previous boss disagreed, but you still found a way to get your point across.
8. In your opinion, what does it take to be a "success"?
9. What kind of customers upset you? How do you deal with them?
10. How do you handle rejection?
11. What are three keys to successful telephone sales?
12. What could your past employers count on you for, without fail?
13. Give me two examples of things you've done in previous jobs that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.
14. How do you define your closing style?
15. Jobs have pros and cons. What do you see as the pros and cons of selling?
16. How motivated are you by money?
17. What does growth in the job mean to you?
18. How do you approach your work from the stand point of balancing your career and your personal life?
19. Tell me about a time when you turned an occasional buyer into a regular customer.
20. What should a sales person know about each customer?
21. How do you go about establishing rapport with a prospect?
22. What kind of hours do you typically work?
23. Give me two examples of decisions you had to make on your last job.
24. What two or three things are important to you in a job?
25. Of all the work you have done, where have you been the most successful?
26. Do you prefer to speak with someone in person or send a memo or an email?
27. Think of something that you consider a failure in your career. What did you learn from it?
28. What is the most important feature in a job?
29. What do you do when things are slow at work?
30. How do you prefer to be managed?
31. How do you know you are doing a good job?
32. How do you manage your paperwork when you would rather be selling?
33. Selling can be stressful. How do you manage stress?
34. Tell me about a time when you were making a sales call and put your foot in your mouth?
35. What two adjectives best describe you?
36. What are the biggest pressures of your last (or present) job?
37. What are some of the things your supervisor did that you disliked?
38. What are some of the basic factors that motivate you in your work?
39. Tell me about the most unusual objection you ever received and how you handled it.
40. Tell me about a sale you lost that really hurt.
41. Tell me about a time when, rather than following instructions, you went about a task in your own way. What happened?
42. What causes you to lose your temper?
43. What is the most intellectually challenging thing you are looking for in a job, and why?
44. What are your most important long-term goals?
45. How would you react if you were asked to fill in for someone who has different, even lower-level, responsibilities?
46. At what times do you have trouble communicating with people?
47. How do you prioritize your time?