

Your Career Advisor

Creating a Workable Hiring Profile: How Do You Fit?

By Carol Schultz

Making a “good” hire can seem like a formidable task, even to the most experienced hiring manager. There can be a multitude of requirements for any job, whether you’re looking for a CEO or field sales rep. With that said, how does one improve the chances of making a “good” hire? Who should be responsible for creating that profile that accurately defines such a hire? How can you make sure you, as a candidate, fit the profile?

I’ve spent a great deal of time interviewing clients about their needs and wants when it comes to creating a job description. I ask many tough questions to understand what will work for the company. It’s my responsibility as an executive search professional to best match their needs with candidates who will be successful in their organization, regardless of the level of the hire.

But there are many companies out there that create their own hiring profiles without the benefit of a qualified search professional. This most often occurs when a company uses its own staff and/or networking rather than hiring a search professional. The hiring manager (CEO, VP of sales, field sales manager, etc.) creates a list of items that is sent to Human Resources or the company’s internal search organization to be rewritten and posted on the company’s website and/or on job boards. The potential problem here is that the internal staff may not be aware of the questions to ask to ensure they’re looking for the “right” fit for the company.

Becoming that “good” hire for an organization can be an equally challenging task. Understanding these questions, and knowing the answers, can also be helpful if you’re sitting at the other side of the desk as the job seeker hoping to become a company’s “right” fit. Use this outline for a hiring profile (one that your

potential employer can and should implement) as a check-list of sorts to determine your qualifications for a particular job.

Formulating the Questions

A hiring profile, in its most basic form, is a fairly simple task. The first and most difficult part is the list of questions you must answer honestly when generating an accurate and effective profile. These questions include:

1. Who is running the company?
2. What size organization are we?
3. What are we selling?
4. Who is our target audience?
5. Who are our competitors and where do we fit into the mix?
6. How are we perceived in the marketplace?

Who is Running the Company?

Who are the individuals on the executive team and what, if any, experience does a candidate have in other companies like ours? For example, if considering the qualifications of the VP of sales, has this individual ever held the position prior to the current position? If so, what size company? How much P/L has he been responsible for in the past? Has he worked for, and been successful with, a company the size of ours? Has he sold similar products? How many direct reports does he have and is he experienced at managing managers or field sales?

What Size Organization are We?

Are we a small startup with limited resources, a global corporation or something in between? There are two important considerations here. First, if we’re a small company, we need an individual with this type of experience. Many times, individuals who have only worked for global companies take jobs within small companies only to find out that it’s not what they thought it would be. This isn’t to say that a large company person can’t

be successful in a small organization. You just need to be aware and ask good questions. Secondly, we’re long past the tech boom when people would accept jobs for big salaries and considerable stock options. Candidates want you to put your money where your mouth is, so to speak.

What are We Selling?

Do we have a niche product or a bag of products? Is it a “need-to-have” or “nice-to-have”? If a candidate is dying to talk to you when you’re selling an unproven, nice-to-have product, that’s likely a red flag. What’s the average deal size? What’s the sales cycle? Are we selling into existing customers, new accounts or a combination? You wouldn’t want to hire a sales rep, for example, who has only covered existing business, when you’re calling into 100 percent new business.

Who is Our Target Audience?

Are we selling to CxOs, director-level executives, engineers, etc.? Are we targeting Fortune 100, 500, 1000, 2000, or mom-and-pop shops? Are we dealing with customers who understand what we’re selling or do we have to evangelize and create need?

Who are Our Competitors and Where Do We Fit into the Mix?

Let’s say that you’re in a market with nine competitors. Four of those companies are direct competitors and the other five are fringe competitors. Where do you rank among the four direct competitors? If you’re No. 1, you should be able to attract the best candidates in your market. After all, it will most likely be a professional improvement for the candidate. If you’re No. 5, you’ll be looking in a different ballpark. Don’t think if you are the No. 5 player that you can realistically obtain a candidate from one of the four companies ahead of you. If anyone from

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one of those top four is interested in you, you need to ask yourself why. It just doesn't make sense for a candidate to want to move from the major leagues to a farm team. If that is the case, however, you need to do extra due diligence on the candidate, because there has to be a reason he's looking at you.

How are We Perceived in the Marketplace?

I'm sure we've all heard that "perception is reality." How your company is perceived by potential candidates will directly affect their willingness to talk to you about your opportunity. If the candidate sees your company as a "churn and burn" or "revolving door," for example, you may lose any potential candidate looking for some semblance of security. To increase the candidate pool of qualified candidates you may have to do a great deal of objection handling and/or damage control to have the opportunity to interview good candidates.

If you're viewed as a quality company to work for or even listed as a top company to work for by a notable business magazine, you'll likely attract a candidate looking for a quality of work situation. Yet, this doesn't guarantee you'll get the

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my search going. When I told my recruiter that I had four interviews this week, she was surprised and said, "Wow, I'm glad you are still looking." Although the opportunity she is trying to place me at would be my first choice, I'm doubtful that I will land there.

ExecuNet member Scott Starr: I am also going through some recruiters, as well as working on my own. It is true that sometimes the hiring companies "use" recruiters to get an internal candidate the position. Here is what I mean: I was recently talking to a recruiter, who claimed the client company wanted international experience, which I had. Next,

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Once you've finished the profile, look at each item individually and determine its importance to the potential success of the hire.

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candidates you're looking for. Often, candidates will view top companies as those that give up potential dollars for that comfort situation, which can affect who will want to talk to you.

Use the Answers to Craft Your Profile

Once you've answered these questions, you can create your profile. Just use your answers as a guide. Remember that the answers to these questions can directly affect the quality of candidate you can realistically attract. Once you've finished the profile, look at each item individually and determine its importance to the potential success of the hire. Does it honestly and realistically represent your requirement? Is the candidate you've described the kind of person who will

they wanted a specific type of international experience. I also had that.

This went through several iterations, when the hiring company found some small part of the job where I did not have experience. Then all of a sudden there was an "internal candidate" from Europe who fit the bill. I knew the person, and he did NOT fit the bill.

I also went through an informal interview at a trade show. The hiring manager's mouth dropped when we met and I explained my experience. The next day an internal candidate, again, was hired.

The above are not the fault of the recruiter. In my opinion, the recruiter was taken for a ride, as was I, for being told I was the leading candidate on both positions.

As for recruiters, it is also always good

want to work for your organization? Put the profile away for a day and revisit it tomorrow. Make any additions, subtractions or modifications.

There's one last thing to do prior to commencing with your search. Circle all the items on your list that are "need-to-have" and then rank the unmarked as "nice-to-have" items in order of importance. Any candidates missing even one "need-to-have" quality are removed from consideration. If your search narrows to two or three candidates, use your ranked "nice-to-have" characteristics to determine which candidate should move forward in the process. If two candidates who match up equally remain, now is the appropriate time to utilize your "gut" feelings to help you narrow down your search to a final candidate and a back-up candidate.

As a candidate, now that you know what your potential employers are looking for, you can position yourself as the ultimate solution to their problems. Knowing their questions will undoubtedly help you craft the right answers. ■

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to ask them if they are exclusive for this position. If not, it brings a different dynamic. I would also ask the person conducting the interview (if you get that far) if the recruiter is exclusive for this position (it's a fair question). I respect the business channel of the recruiter; but if I feel the recruiter is not keeping his end of the bargain, I will let him know that I am contacting the people with whom I spoke directly, or ask the recruiter if he has an available time to call the hiring manager together. This will usually get the recruiter to move, and it shows the hiring company that you respect business channels.

Unless YOU pay a recruiter to find you a job, they work for themselves, or if exclusive, for the hiring company. It is kind of like a realtor when buying a house. ■

Dream Candidate

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“If they’ve already ‘wallpapered the industry,’ the candidate can only hope the recruiter gets a job assignment they fit very well and that the recruiter believes it’s worthwhile getting them considered without running the risk of being paid no fee,” adds Kendall.

The Industry Transition

If you’re seeking to change industries, keep in mind that recruiters aren’t career counselors and probably can’t advise you on such a change in your career path. In this case, you may be better served by a career coach who can help guide your transition. Kendall says that his client companies typically seek candidates with specific experience in the client’s arena. “Someone without knowledge of the industry, products and competition is very unlikely to get selected versus the other candidates I will bring to the company,” adds Kendall. “The only exception, which is rare, is the company who specifically wants someone from outside their industry.”

Borkin says that if a candidate has worked in a specific industry for more than 10 years, his chances of being able

Expert Resources:

- Andy Borkin, Strategic Advancement Inc. (sai-hr.com)
- Krista Bradford, The Good Search (TheGoodSearch.net)
- Glenn Gutmacher, Recruiting-Online.com (Recruiting-Online.com)
- Steve Kendall, Management Recruiters of Atlanta West Inc. (steve@mraw.net)
- David Nosal, Nosal Partners LLC (NosalPartners.com)

to switch industries are slim. “The longer you stay, the more difficult it is,” he adds.

Making the Dream Come True

The real key to success in the recruiter-candidate relationship is if the individuals form a true partnership and work in concert to achieve their goals. Understanding what each individual needs can help ensure that happens.

“What do all parties want? They want a process that is smooth and fast; then, they get quality candidates in record time with minimal effort; and candidates get ideal positions,” says Robert Wilson, president of Tyler, Texas-based executive recruiting firm R.L. Wilson & Associates LLC and an ExecuNet member. “The more that is communicated upfront and the more thorough information is communicated, the better.”

It’s important to always remember that when working with recruiters, you’re

not competing for a job; your objective is to be identified by recruiters as the ideal candidate for their client. If you’re not a match, don’t ruin the relationship. “If you are not viewed as a perfect fit for the job, there is nothing you can do but leave a favorable impression of being professional, mature and talented,” says Prichard. “It is not in your best interest to criticize, argue with, challenge or create conflict with a search consultant no matter how unprofessionally you may be treated or how poor the search consultant communicates with you. Just remember him or her when it is your time to hire a search consultant.” Recruiters always appreciate referrals, and will keep you top-of-mind if you serve as a source of other candidates.

“If everyone followed the golden rule and put themselves in the other party’s shoes and considered their needs, the whole process would go smoother and be more efficient,” adds Wilson. ■

Insider Insight

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Once you have made an initial contact, follow up on an irregularly regular basis. Have a reason to call or email, not just to check on their search status. Let recruiters know when an organization

may be having a monthly meeting or a conference. Information heard on the street is always good, such as a potential purchase, layoff, or internal cultural issues that a company may have. ■

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