You're Hired!: Hiring Experts Share Insights On Best Practices

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You search and screen and interview for the best employees. Days pass, sometimes weeks, as you narrow down your choices (and continue to operate understaffed). You pull the trigger, make the hire, and within days you realize you've made a mistake--sooner if your new hire never even shows.

Let's face it, hiring the right employees is the bane of existence for franchise operators. Yet without top-performing front-line employees and unit-level managers--the face of your franchise--you will not be as successful as you could be. Hiring right often seems a mysterious, unachievable goal lacking any chance of long-term success.

"The challenge is that we really want the cream of the crop and sometimes we end up with the cream of the crap," says Bill Wagner, CEO and co-founder of Accord Management Systems, a company that specializes in behavioral and hiring consulting.

Hiring right is an ongoing challenge for multi-unit franchisees, but according to the experts we spoke with, there is hope--if you employ the right strategies, systems, and tools, and follow through consistently.

Get the right tools for the job

Hiring right requires the right tools. More and more, these tools can be found in automated, web-based systems, sometimes called talent management systems (integrated software packages that handle all the essential components not only for hiring, but also for tracking and managing employees after they've been hired).

Automated hiring tools will never replace person-to-person screening and interviewing, but they have become one of the most efficient ways to hire the best employees, says Blake Helppie, CEO of JobApp Network, a company that helps businesses improve the quality of each hire.

"The best option is to use an automated hiring solution that can streamline the application process, administer and score validated and compliant job-related personality assessments, manage background checks, process employee tax credits, onboard new hires, and upload directly to your payroll/POS/HRIS," says Helppie.

For employers looking to improve and streamline their hiring process, an abundance of online assessment tools is available. Helppie says these sourcing and screening tools can help attract and identify the right talent for any organization. Verification tools can reduce the time for background checks, and onboarding tools can help new employees become more productive sooner.
"No company that relies on employees to drive their business should hire without the assistance of pre-employment behavioral assessment tools," says Steve Waterhouse, founder and president of Predictive Results, a PI Worldwide member firm that provides talent management tools and training. He says today's tools are proven to help businesses select higher-performing employees more likely to stay on the job, achieve greater success, and be less likely to get hurt. These tools are designed to identify employees who will drive sales, deliver top-drawer customer service, and provide metrics important to improving your operation.

Says Waterhouse, "This is how you put the right people in every position." And when it comes to knowing what type of person and skill set will succeed in each of your hourly positions, Waterhouse boils it down to six criteria: skills, experience, education, knowledge, capability, and behavioral fit. Call it a "profile" of your perfect employee.

Combining applicant tracking software with behavioral assessments in a web-based application allows multi-unit franchisees to send candidates to a single site and collect applications electronically. Hiring managers can then select the top prospects, send follow-up emails, invite candidates for further testing or interviews, and track the entire hiring and onboarding process.

What's more, the right technology can create an organized hiring process that gives decision-makers the knowledge--and time--they need to make the best choices. "You don't want your store managers making rushed decisions when it comes to hiring," says Joe Bocian, account executive for Snagajob, a company that provides workforce management solutions for hourly employers.

**Getting started**

A good hiring system that relies on solid technology tools and clearly defined hiring goals can make a big difference in any organization. Whether you're using the latest technology or still relying on pen and paper, building an effective hiring process should begin with standardization. The goal is to create a hiring system that can be implemented effectively and replicated over time.

The first step involves screening and pre-qualifying candidates. Helppie summarizes the essential ingredients of the screening/pre-qualifying process as follows:

1. **Pre-qualification**: Do they meet the practical aspects of the specific job--e.g., days of the week, shift, wages, type of work, part- or full-time, etc.?

2. **Position fitness**: This includes skills, experience, aptitude, and work habits. How well will they be able to do the job? How many jobs have they had in the past 2 years? If a cook, are they ServSafe-certified? How much weight can they lift? What type of retail experience do they have?

3. **Personality assessment**: How likely is someone to be successful in your company? There are many variations of these tests, but what matters as an employer is to find a validated and compliant assessment method or tool that focuses on the core competencies that drive success in their business, e.g., positive sales attitudes, persuasiveness, energy, initiative, good judgment, and tolerance for frustration.
One area many operators miss is in not creating a solid employee position profile. From front-line employees to unit and regional managers, there is a particular type of person and skill set that gets each job done in your units. Do you know what that person looks like, on paper and in person?

Profiling the perfect candidate boils down to three key areas--company culture, benchmarking top performers, and measuring results--says Rebecca Monet, president of Proven Match, a company that helps determine compatibility and predict the performance of prospective franchisees as well as their key employees. "Company culture is looking for compatibility, sustainability, retention, and trainability. As with the franchisee, employees should also share the company's values and mission," says Monet.

Next is benchmarking top performers by determining what attributes and skill sets successful employees have in each specific job or area. "If this is not doable internally, build a reference model based on best practices shared within the franchise organization," she says.

Third, measure and assess results. As a company evolves, says Monet, so does the role of each employee. Initial and key hires will require special attention because they set the pace for the company. Keep a close eye on values, work style, and core competencies.

**Expediting the process**

Gary Walstrom, founder of Culture Index, a hiring consulting and technology company, has been using assessment tests for more than 35 years, helping franchisees build their systems using different hiring tools. Many of today's automated and online tools are good, but Walstrom cautions multi-unit operators to "make sure they come with training and support." If you don't understand something about the technology, make sure there is someone at the vendor easily available to work with you.

Another advantage in using technology in the hiring process is speed: matching employers with employees quickly. "Many hiring processes take too long," says Walstrom. "Technology can help expedite the process because you need employees now and job seekers need jobs now." Done correctly, he says, "In most cases there's no reason you can't have an applicant walking onto the job within 72 to 96 hours from the time the application is submitted."

In-person interviewing is still a critical component of hiring right, but it can be difficult to execute well. Walstrom and others recommend using a thorough, concise series of open-ended questions. The goal is to get the candidate to open up about previous jobs, work experience, and personality traits.

"I recommend using what I call a five-part interview question," says Walstrom. "Rather than just asking How did you like your last job at Burger King? ask things like: What kind of work did you do? What did you like most about the job? What did you like least about the job? Describe working with your manager."

Helppie recommends developing interview questions by specific job position and the needs and requirements of each. He says these questions should be used consistently with every candidate. In
addition, hiring managers can use candidate-specific probes based on assessment results to investigate any areas of potential concern and to confirm areas of strength. "While automated hiring solutions can pre-screen to get you to the top 20 percent of candidates quickly, there is no substitute for a good behavioral interview," he says.

Beyond developing a well-thought-out list of interview questions, Walstrom suggests that multi-unit operators should have one really good interviewer at each location. "Not all franchisees know what it takes to succeed in every position in their units," he says. "Find individuals on your crews who know the jobs and provide them with the tools, resources, and freedom to do the interviewing."

**Best practices**

"Hiring right means taking the guesswork out," says Monet. When hiring key employees, franchisees cannot be subjective in their approach, she says. Thus, to reduce recruiting, hiring, training, and management costs, multi-unit operators should employ a structured interviewing process and an objective profiling tool. A number of best practices have been developed over years of time and trial (see [10 Tips to a Better Hire](#)).

Hiring is often driven by emotions, which can be difficult to completely eliminate from the process. Maintaining objectivity, standards, and consistency is essential. Structure a process to ensure that all candidates meet minimum requirements--and that your managers use to identify top candidates based on the key job criteria and core competencies for success, says Helppie. "With good reporting tools in an automated solution, you can review the quality of hire that individual managers are making and coach them into improving," he says.

After all is said and done, the goal is to identify and hire the best employees for each role in your organization. Doing so will benefit both you and the people you hire. To succeed in this, start by creating a profile of the employee you're looking for, says Waterhouse. "Assess your top performers and define your ideal target model," he says. Understand the ideal candidate for each position in terms of skill, knowledge, education, and behavioral style. "Prioritize top candidates and interview them quickly and effectively--and be willing to say no to the candidates who don't fit your criteria, even if you like them," he says.

Be sure to refine your model as your experience and needs change, and be willing to grow from your mistakes. "As you hire employees, be open to learning more about what you may be overlooking in your process, things you should be doing but haven't been. Then make the adjustments," says Walstrom. "Great employees work for good companies and good companies have great employees." If that doesn't describe your company, it's time to work harder at hiring right.