

How-To Avoid Hiring Toxic Employees



If you're a regular reader of my articles, you know how much importance I place on hiring the right people. As I've written about previously, hiring the wrong people can prove expensive, adversely affect your bottom line and the morale of everyone in the organization. While there are plenty of ways to find those diamonds in the rough, there are also ways to weed out potential toxic employees during the hiring or interview process as well.

Make Everyone Part of the Process

If you're considering bringing someone onto your team, there is likely no better feedback than from your team itself. For this reason, it's a great idea to get everyone together for lunch or dinner or some other fun activity outside the workplace to see how the potential hire gets along with everyone. Conversely, this opportunity gives the job candidate a chance to see how they will fit in with the culture and values of your team. This simple effort will let both parties know right away if it's going to be a good fit for everyone or not, and gives you a chance to see the person's personality outside of the somewhat artificial interview atmosphere.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Too many interviewers make the mistake of asking yes and no questions from a preset template during an interview and fail to dig deeper to find out who they are really talking to. While there is a time and place for rudimentary questions,

it's also important to ask hypothetical questions like "Give me an example of how you handled (fill in the blank) situation in the past." or "What would you do if you were faced with (fill in the blank) in the future?" While most good interviewees will be able to quickly cite one example when faced with these types of questions, they may have a more difficult time providing additional anecdotes. The best ones should be able to provide multiple examples and will give you a better idea of their depth of knowledge of the topic.

If you feel like you still need more insight, consider asking some of the following questions:

- What would you most like to improve about yourself?
- What do you think your former supervisor would say about you, positive and negative?
- What do you notice is different about yourself when you're under too much stress?
- What types of people do you work best with? How about those that you find difficult?
- Describe in detail a couple of instances where you failed in the past and how you dealt with it.

Pay Close Attention to Behaviors

As you ask the questions above, you should also take into consideration behaviors like punctuality and preparedness.

- Did the candidate show up on time for the interview with their affairs in order?
- Do they readily blame others, or do they seem to accept responsibility when things don't go as planned?
- Do they speak highly of former colleagues and employers? Or do they speak poorly of them and throw them under the bus?
- While answers to questions are important to take note of, so is the way someone behaves during an interview.

Ask Specific Questions when Checking References

Whether it's due to lack of time or the feeling that it's not important, most interviewers don't thoroughly vet a candidate through their references. Instead of calling references when time permits and having only a brief conversation, make the effort to schedule a few minutes when you can both talk about the potential hire in some depth.

When you get the time to chat with someone's reference, it's important to have some specific questions in mind to keep the conversation on track.

Some examples might include:

- Would you rehire this person? Why or why not?
- Did the person demonstrate emotional intelligence? Were they able to read people properly and react accordingly?
- Describe the duties of the position the person is interviewing for and ask their reference, "Do you feel (applicant's name) would be a good fit for this role and why?"
- Were they a team player or did they prefer to keep to themselves and worry only about their own work?
- How did they handle authority and constructive criticism?
- Is there anything else you should know about the candidate that hasn't been discussed?
- As you're processing the answers the reference is giving you, take note of more than just their words as you would when interviewing the candidate. Did the reference's tone of voice convey admiration for the candidate? Or did they speak quickly and seem nervous about providing honest answers?

These subtle clues can give you valuable insight into who the candidate is as well.

Be Respectful

It's easy to get so wrapped up in learning about someone else and their experiences that you forget to notice your own demeanor. How's your tone of voice? Are you actively listening and making eye contact? Or is your head buried in your notepad? If you act professionally and treat each candidate you interview with respect, you will likely receive the same in return.

Regardless of whether you're hiring someone for a C-suite position or a janitor, taking adequate time to ask the right questions and really get to know them can make all the difference. While making the occasional bad hire is something that every manager is going to do at some point, knowing how to weed out potentially toxic candidates goes a long way in saving money, [maximizing productivity](#) and keeping company morale high. If you put into practice even a few of the ideas discussed above, you'll be on your way to hiring only the best people for your organization.

If you are hiring someone in the [life science industries in the Bay Area](#), I can help find a great employee that fits the position. Contact me, Jeff King, at jking@rqfocus.com or (541) 639-3501.