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I've watched companies bring in genuinely strong RA or QA talent, people with the right background, the right experience, the right instincts, and still watch that person struggle for the first several months. It's tempting to assume the hire was wrong. Often, the real issue started before the person ever walked in the door.

Most job descriptions describe the work. Very few describe what success actually looks like. "Manage the submission process" tells someone what they'll be doing. It doesn't tell them what "doing it well" means to the people they'll be reporting to. Is success hitting a specific date? Reducing back-and-forth with reviewers? Building a process the team didn't have before? Those are three different jobs wearing the same title.

I've sat in enough hiring conversations to notice a pattern. When I ask a hiring manager what the new person needs to accomplish in the first six months, I often get a pause before the answer. They can describe the work in detail, task by task. What's usually missing is a clear sense of what "this is going well" actually looks like from where they sit.

That gap doesn't disappear once someone's hired, it just moves. The new person spends their first few months guessing at what matters most, prioritizing based on assumptions instead of agreement. Sometimes they guess right. Often, they focus on the wrong thing, working hard on something the hiring manager considers secondary, while something that actually matters sits untouched. Three months in, the hiring manager starts wondering why this "great hire" isn't clicking. The new person, meanwhile, thinks they've been doing exactly what was

asked.

Nobody had agreed on the definition of right.

The leaders I've seen avoid this problem take a few extra minutes early in the process to answer three questions out loud, before the first candidate is ever interviewed. What will this person own, specifically, that no one else is currently responsible for? What decision-making authority comes with the role? And what would need to be true in six months for both of us to agree this was a good hire?

Those questions are uncomfortable in a useful way. They often expose disagreement within the leadership team itself about what the role is really for, a disagreement that is much cheaper to resolve before a candidate is involved than after someone's already three months into a job they were never fully briefed on.

Once that clarity exists, everything downstream gets easier. Interview questions get sharper, because you're testing for the actual outcome rather than a general sense of experience. Onboarding gets faster, because the new hire isn't spending their first quarter reverse-engineering what actually matters. And when performance conversations happen later, they're grounded in something both sides agreed to at the start, not something that got decided after the fact, by whoever was more frustrated.

This comes up often in growing RA and QA organizations, where roles evolve quickly and job descriptions rarely keep pace. The strongest hiring outcomes I've seen don't come from finding a more impressive résumé. They come from leaders who take the time to define success before they ever start looking for someone to deliver it.