Peer Interviewing Pays Off-Even During a Staff Shortage

Description

The critical step in building and sustaining a great organization is the selection of talent. Yet having so many job openings and so few people to fill them can lead to not taking the best steps in hiring. Leaders face so much pressure. Often when we feel short-staffed, the bar gets lowered. Itâ??s easy to see why this happens.

If there are not enough people to staff the operation, the following takes place: The leaders work in direct service as part of the staff. This is not unusual at peak times; however, when this happens, often the manager falls behind in other work. Then, when the manager is in the work area, the staff might say, â??We need more help.â?• The leader moves quickly to hire in order to be helpful to the staff.

So, the manager hires someone to solve an immediate need, and the person starts work. Very quickly it is obvious to the coworkers that the new employee does not have the needed skills for the job and may not be able to acquire them. Then when the manager comes through, instead of hearing, â??Thank you for hiring someone,â?• they hear that the person will not work out. Instead of the hiring being seen as positive, it is seen as negative.

These are tough times. So many places need help, and it is creating all sorts of issues. Businesses are reducing hours, reducing services, and working what staff there is to the point they are exhausted and at risk for quitting. Some employers are having to shut down.

While many articles are written with suggestions that can be helpful, the reality is there are no easy answers. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, one thing that can sometimes help is peer interviewing.

My experience is that while including the potential coworkers in hiring will not solve all the issues or be perfect, it is one thing a company can do to improve hiring and alleviate the chances of hearing from the staff, â??Why did you hire this person?â?•

Include the peers in the selection process, and two things will happen quickly. One, the peers will not lower the bar as much as the leader may feel pressure to do so. Why? They are the ones who are most impacted by a mis-hire. It is very common for people to say to their manager after interviewing a

candidate, â??We would rather work short-staffed than work with that person.â?• It also shows the staff that the leader is very aware of the issue and is working hard to bring in candidates.

Here are some concerns I hear from managers who are reluctant to turn over the final selection to the staff:

â??The employees are already too busy. I hate to ask them to do more.â?• Ask the staff if they want to be part of the selection process. You will most likely hear a *yes.* If there is caution, it is due to staff worrying that they have never hired people and donâ??t know how. Assure them they will receive training.

â??What if they hire someone I donâ??t feel will be a good fit?â?• The solution here is not to pass anyone you are concerned about on to the peer interviewing phase. You are the screener.

â??What if they ask a question that legally is not supposed to be asked?â?• There are lots of resources and materials on questions not to ask. These are part of the training for staff on hiring.

â??What questions should be asked?â?• There are so many great resources. Go to your search engine and type in â??behavioral-based questions for interviewing candidates.â?•

A few more tips:

Selection is a team effort. As the leader, share the plan with the peers who will be interviewing the candidates, because you will be sending the people along for them to interview.

The peersâ?? main role is to see if the fit is a good one. Do be sensitive to the makeup of the peer interview team. You want to also train people to watch for bias and provide a list of questions that cannot be asked.

At times leaders will feel the person will do well in the peer interview, yet they will not. The peers may see something that the leader missed. Sometimes a candidate will open up with potential coworkers beyond what they did with the leader. Do not overrule the peers.

I received an email from a leader of a physical medicine department some months after I had been on site to help them set up a selection process that included peer interviewing. In the email, the leader stated that she was not in favor of the peer interview process, but she did it because she had to. There were two candidates she felt could do the job. She stated that she liked one much more than the other but passed both along, feeling quite confident the peers would choose the one she felt was the best. To her surprise, the peers selected the other candidate.

The email then stated she went along with the peers in part to show that the system did not work. She then said that itâ??s now been six months since the person started working, and the candidate the peers preferred is one of the best hires she has ever had. She shared she has learned a valuable lesson on the benefits of including the workforce in the hiring process.

Not only will coworkers be more supportive during staff shortages if they are the ones who say no to a candidate, theyâ??ll also be very committed to helping the new employee get off to a great start. Because they are involved in the selection, the peers are naturally invested in the new personâ??s success.

There is no real downside to peer interviewing when itâ??s done properly. Over the years Iâ??ve found itâ??s one of the most valuable hiring and retention tools that a leader has at their disposal. Of course, like anything else, it is not always an instant process. Employees know whom they want to work withâ??give them a chance to weigh in, and even if the company is short-staffed in the short term, it will pay off in the long term.

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