

## YOU'VE HIRED THE CANDIDATE FROM HELL: How not to make the same mistake twice!



Marilyn Lustgarten

*"We like what we see on your resume. Can you come in for an interview?"* Typically, this marks the beginning of the employee selection process. Unfortunately, many times the interview is also the *end* of the process.

It's been highly publicized that "embellished" resumes are getting otherwise undesirable candidates hired into positions that they ordinarily wouldn't land. Too often, the organization finds out much too late that "Michelle is an inflexible dictator" or "Bob couldn't finish a project on time to save his life!" The information presented in a resume, or an interview, for that matter should not be the only factor in the decision of who to hire. *"I'm a pretty good judge of character,"* claims the manager who believes he or she will know the right candidate halfway into the interview and makes a job offer immediately based on that "gut feeling". The truth is, interviewing alone is probably the *worst* way to determine a candidate's acceptability. Ask yourself this: "Have I hired winners by using interviews alone? Have I hired losers using the same method? If the answer is "yes" to both questions, then you'll understand why it's a pretty unreliable predictor of success. A study conducted by Michigan State University School of Business concluded that using interviews alone is only 14% effective in predicting a candidate's future success on the job.

Outplacement coaches, career counselors and self-help books teach and encourage prospective candidates to craft answers to difficult questions so as not to raise red flags during an interview. For example, someone who was fired for being an inflexible dictator might be coached to answer the question *"Why did you leave your last position?"* as *"I have very high standards and believe in doing the right thing at all times. Unfortunately, others in the organization felt differently, so I left."* At face value, who wouldn't be thinking, "Wow, this honest, ethical, quality-focused individual is an answer to my prayers...I wonder how soon she can start!" Without further consideration, however, chances are good that you've just hired "Michelle".

You'll find out the hard way that you've made a big mistake when the *real* "Michelle" surfaces and you start to experience problems such as turnover and decreased productivity that were previously nonexistent.

A company truly committed to hiring only talent suitably matched to its culture and values will consistently use a comprehensive employee selection process, *regardless of what's happening in the business*. **Here is my prescription for success:**

1. Start by having **concise, accurate job descriptions** that include critical skills and competencies. For example, if reliability, flexibility, speaking effectively in public, initiating improvement or taking risks are as important as a certain degree or related experience then specify that on the job description.

2. Use a **marketing approach** to identify sources likely to produce the candidates you are seeking. If you're still only putting an ad in the local Sunday paper, take another look at your methods for recruiting appropriate candidates.
3. **Pre-screen candidates for basic qualifications** against those listed on the job description. I recommend calling the candidates in addition to reviewing what has been provided on the resume and application. What they say and how they say it over the phone may advance or eliminate someone from your candidate list.
4. Narrow down the pool based on the closest successful preliminary matches and **only interview potentially qualified individuals**.
5. Use the same **relevant behavior-based interview questions** so you can objectively evaluate candidate responses. Ensure only managers trained to do so are interviewing candidates. Also, try to move the interview phase along as quickly as possible to minimize the risk of losing top candidates to the competition.
6. Use validated **assessments** to help determine the potential fit of your top candidates. The results of an effective personality assessment, for example, could have eliminated "Michelle" from further consideration, even though she did very well in the personal interview.
7. Perform **background checks** to confirm what you've learned from the candidate. This includes checking references, verifying current and former employment (which is NOT the same as checking references), criminal records, degrees and other credentials, as appropriate or, in some cases, required by law.
8. Post-offer **drug testing** is highly recommended for all positions at all levels. (Yes, even top executives). No organization is immune to potential problems, or can afford the risks associated with impaired decision-making.

Using a consistent process for selecting both external and internal candidates to ensure you have the right person in every job will solidify the culture and dramatically impact business performance. Cutting corners shouldn't be an option.

---

*Marilyn Lustgarten, president of The Star Makers Group, LLC, is an organizational strategist, coach and consultant to management in organizations ready to move to the next level. Contact her through their website [www.starmakersgroup.com](http://www.starmakersgroup.com).*

*2005 The Star Makers Group, LLC. All rights reserved.*