



HONE YOUR HIRING SKILLS



EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON HOW TO RECRUIT TOP TALENT, AVOID COMMON HIRING MISTAKES, AND ASK BETTER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BY HANNAH WALLACE

People are the most essential asset to any business, yet hiring the right person for the right role is one of the most difficult skills to master. Even experienced recruiters say that hiring—part science, part art—requires years of experience, observation, and study to get it right.

To help you hone your hiring chops, we canvassed human resource managers and recruiters both in and outside the industry to get their pro tips on finding the best person for the job.

Hire in a Recession (If You Can)

Periods of economic downturn have historically been unparalleled hiring opportunities, says Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, an executive fellow at Harvard Business School. Fernández-Aráoz describes how, after World War II, Hewlett-Packard took advantage of the abundant supply of experienced engineers leaving positions at closing military labs and snapped them up, in spite of a struggling bottom line. “Years later, when asked about the biggest contributor to HP’s success over the years, [HP’s founders] routinely cited their willingness to invest in talent no matter the external economic climate,” Fernández-Aráoz explains.

The same tactic is true during today’s crisis as well, says Georgette Farkas, former longtime director of marketing and public relations for Daniel Boulud’s restaurant group. “Four months ago, finding good people—from dishwasher to manager—was the hardest thing about our business!” says Farkas, who ran her own restaurant, Rotisserie Georgette, for seven years before closing it in January. (She is now the culinary ambassador at Great Performances Catering.) “This is a good time for restaurants to be looking, because there are so many great people out there.”

Articulate Your Ideal Candidate

Although specifically articulating an ideal candidate may seem obvious, it’s a process many overlook, says Diane Garfield, vice president of human resources at Folio Wine Group.

“I compare it to going to the grocery store without a list when you’re starving,” says Garfield. She forces hiring managers to sit down and talk about what qualities their ideal candidate possesses. First, think very specifically about who has done

well in this job in the past. What was *her* drive like? What was *her* curiosity like?

At Boly:Welch, Portland, Oregon's leading staffing and recruiting agency, recruiters ask clients to write down what kind of skills, motivation, experience, and education add up to a successful fit for the role. "If you don't know what you're looking for, you won't know when you've found it," says CEO and cofounder Pat Welch. Like Garfield, Welch also pushes hiring managers to think hard about past successes. "Tell me who your superstars were in this arena. Let me get to know what they have in common so I can get you another superstar," says Welch.

David Newlin, an executive recruiter for the wine industry at Newlin Associates, gives hiring executives a homework assignment. "What are the six to 10 most important accomplishments this person has to deliver on in the first year? If you don't do that, you don't actually know if this person is right for the job," he says.

Don't Rush to Fill the Position

After 17 years of hiring for such restaurant groups as Alain Ducasse, Daniel Boulud, and Michael Mina, Cynthia Billeaud says one of the biggest mistakes she's made is rushing the process.

"Anytime I went into those meetings with chefs and VPs, I'd ask, 'And when do we need the position filled by?' The answer was always: 'The position needs to be filled yesterday!'" says Billeaud. Now, as founder of FnB Talents, her own recruiting company, Billeaud finds herself persuading hiring managers to slow down.

The interview process at E. & J. Gallo Winery usually takes anywhere between 60 and 90 days, says vice president of global human resources Michelle Lewis. Similarly at Fetzer, the process can take three weeks or more—especially for advanced positions, says Lynnette Porter, vice president of human resources. For a brand marketing position at Fetzer, in later rounds the candidate has to problem-solve hypothetical business situations.



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- Georgette Farkas

It's a process that helps "ensure that the candidate will be successful here and that they can perform the job that needs to be done," says Porter.

Get Them Out of Their Comfort Zone

For even the most experienced HR managers, it's nearly impossible, in the space of a one-hour interview, to "understand who a person really is," says Farkas. Asking unexpected questions can help. Catalin Pirvu, a manager who Farkas worked with for many years, would ask candidates interviewing for a high-level chef or head waiter job, "If you could go for dinner anywhere tonight in New York City, where would you go?" Though it had nothing to do with their skills as a chef or waiter, it did assess their knowledge of and passion for restaurants.

At Folio, where some positions require entertaining clients outside of

the company, the team usually takes the candidate out to dinner. "We make sure they're polite to the waitstaff, make sure they don't overindulge in wine," says Garfield. She also pays attention to little details such as how the candidate treats the receptionist. "That's one of the most key tells in the process," she says.

It's critical to demand specifics. At Boly:Welch, recruiters are trained to ask "three-deep questions," says Welch. In other words, don't allow a candidate to get away with a generic answer.

In pandemic times, it may be difficult to do in-person interviews, but they are vital—especially in the hospitality industry. "Let us never forget that we need to connect with people in person," says Billeaud. "It's important to feel body-to-body how that chemistry is going to work." Billeaud counsels her restaurant clients to bring a potential sous-chef, for example, into the kitchen for a tour.

Promote from Within (with a Few Exceptions)

Wharton management professor Matthew Bidwell's published research found that outside hires take two years to perform as well as internal hires in the same job. Think about it: You don't have to train an internal hire how to use a whole new inventory system or memorize a new portfolio of wines.



Cynthia Billeaud

Gallo is one major wine company that promotes internally whenever possible, according to Lewis. “We achieve this through internal postings, robust performance assessments, and career pathing tools,” Lewis reports. The existence of such tools could account for why the company’s average retention rate is so high: 12.5 years.

However, promoting internally to the wrong role can be an expensive mistake. “A couple of times, we took a rock-star market sales manager and made them an area sales manager,” says Garfield. (A market manager is out in the field, calling on accounts, while an area manager is typically more of a desk job that entails setting pricing and programming.) “Even though it’s the next step in the job ladder, the jobs are so different,” and the candidate was the wrong fit.

When (and Why) Hiring a Recruiter Saves Time and Money

When you’re looking outside your internal talent pool, it can pay to bring in a recruiter with expertise in the alcoholic beverage industry. With 20 years of industry experience, John and Julie Chuharski at Wine & Spirits Recruiting have recruited for Constellation Brands, Fetzer, and The Hess Collection. “So many recruiters don’t really go the extra mile to make sure it’s a good fit,” says Garfield from Folio. “John slows down and really learns who is going to work well in our culture.” Garfield also works with David Newlin at Newlin Associates, who has 18 years of experience in the wine industry and has recruited for Cakebread Cellars, Crimson Wine Group, and Duckhorn Wine Company.

Newlin uses a behavioral assessment tool called Drake P3. Unlike the Myers-Briggs survey, the Drake P3 questionnaire takes just 15 minutes to fill out, yet it determines everything from a candidate’s emotional intelligence level to his or her communication style and motivational needs. “I do not present candidates to



Diane Garfield



Pat Welch



Lynnette Porter



Michelle Lewis

my clients who score low in emotional intelligence,” says Newlin.

“So much of what a good recruiter does is collect good people,” says Farkas, who hired Cynthia Billeaud at FnB Talents to fill restaurant positions. “They may meet some sous-chef early in her career and can tell they have potential. And they track these people.”

Proactively Seek Out Top Performers

Posting on job boards can turn up compelling candidates, but it’s also important to actively seek them out. Performance-based Hiring is an innovative four-step process for recruiting top performers that’s widely used by startups and Fortune 500 companies, but it hasn’t penetrated the wine and spirits industries yet. Pioneered by Lou Adler at the Adler Group, it is a methodology of best practices that takes into consideration the career trajectory and goals of the candidate. Recruiters can take the month-long online class (which costs \$1,250) to become certified.

In 2011, the Adler Group did research with LinkedIn to understand what top performers across many industries did differently from “B” and “C” players. “What they found is that top performers care about two things before money,” explains David Newlin, who was certified in Performance-based Hiring in 2013. According to Newlin, those two concerns are “What are you going to challenge me to do during my first year, and how will my career be in a better place in three to five years if I take this job instead of staying in my current job?” He adds, “If you don’t

address these two items, you’ll never catch the attention of a top performer or get her to lift her head up from the busyness of her current life.”

Step Up Your DEI Game

Having a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policy is crucial, but it’s just the beginning. What can you do to actually make good on hiring a diverse workforce?

At Gallo, which has been on Glassdoor’s Best Places to Work list for the past four years, all hiring managers are trained on unconscious bias via third-party firms, according to Lewis. But the company also recruits and advertises at historically Black colleges and universities. In addition, the company has internal employee resource groups which encourage networking, support, and career development to support people of color.

Looking outside the wine and spirits industry can be especially helpful in this arena. Nathalie Rodriguez, head of talent at Narrativ, a five-year-old tech startup that’s using AI to build a better internet for shoppers, says her team has a quota of sourcing 150 candidates a week, and 30 percent of those need to be non-white and non-male. “A diverse team attracts diverse candidates,” says Rodriguez. Rodriguez also advertises job openings on Jopwell, which helps companies connect with and recruit candidates from underrepresented groups for jobs and internships. Moreover, Rodriguez requires that two employees conduct each job interview to reduce unconscious bias. “It’s a good way to check each other,” she finds. ■