

Selecting Employees that “Fit”

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Managers are used to making decisions—tough calls that can impact a business for years. One of the most important decisions comes when hiring a new employee. As an astute manager once said, “I don’t worry about hiring a great employee and having him leave in three months. I worry about hiring a bad employee and having him stay for three years.”

In the current labor market, however, managers are usually grateful if they get any applicants for a job—let alone highly qualified applicants. Sometimes it is so important that a position be filled that a person may win the job by default, but is that the best long-run decision for the business? A quick fix may temporarily ease labor pressure, but it is always better to be selective when hiring. The future of the business may depend upon it.

A selective employer cannot possibly choose the right person for a position without first truly understanding the position itself. Managers should perform a **Job Analysis** where every detail of the position is recorded through observations, interviews, and work journals. Suppose a long-time employee retires. It is important that you know everything that employee did, even outside the obvious scope of the job. Maybe that person always made the coffee in the break room or took out the trash—tasks that might be overlooked until one day those things are not done. Now suppose larger, more important, jobs were

not done. The entire business could suffer because the manager did not know all of the responsibilities of an employee.

After the job analysis, compile a list of skills, abilities, licenses or knowledge needed to do the job. This is called a **Job Specification**. An employer should take no skills for granted. If an employee will have to read, write, do basic mathematics, drive a vehicle, lift heavy objects, etc., those things should be listed and considered when evaluating applicants.

Like most things, the most important work is in the preparation. A thorough job analysis and specification will outline the traits, skills, and qualities that should be emphasized during the selection process. The best way to judge whether or not an applicant possesses those skills, traits, and qualities is to run the applicants through some **Hurdles**.

Written Applications gauge an employee's reading and writing abilities and get at background information like years of experience and education. **Written Tests** can evaluate an applicant's technical knowledge.

Practical Tests gauge an applicant's hands-on ability by giving them actual tasks to work through: sorting a pen of cattle, driving a truck, repairing equipment. Other employees may be used to set up or grade the tests. Employers should be very careful when using practical tests, however. If, at any point, the applicant appears to be at risk of injuring anyone or anything, the test should be stopped immediately.

References can provide an insight into the applicant's work history. Employers should be cautious in this area, however, because people have different perspectives and different motives for what they have to say about past employees. The only references that should be relied upon are those from people you know and respect.

Interviews can be a great way to get to know an applicant. Managers should use open-ended questions that show whether or not an applicant has the right personality, skill, and attitude to be successful within the business.

Which of these hurdles is the most effective? It depends on the position and the personalities of the people involved. Certainly, using a combination of hurdles is the most successful strategy. If none of the applicants pass all the hurdles and time permits, managers should not hesitate to re-open applications. It is sometimes better to leave a position open rather than hire someone who isn't a good fit for the position.

Once the new employee is on-board, it is time for the most important aspect of human resource management—training and orientation. More details on this can be found in the _____ issue of Feed-Lot.

To learn more about all aspects of employee management, plan to attend K-State Research and Extension's Employee Management for Production Agriculture Conference on August 2-3, 2001 in Kansas City. More information is available at www.oznet.ksu.edu/employee or by calling 316-431-1530.