



12 COMMON MISTAKES FOR EVERY HOSPITAL HR MANAGER TO AVOID WHEN HIRING

A White Paper for Hospital HR Managers

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the healthcare industry is expected to see an increase of 5.7 million new jobs by 2020. This incredible amount of growth in the health sector will be stimulated by an aging population and an increase in life expectancy. Both of these factors will be driven by breakthroughs in medical treatments and pharmaceuticals. As a consequence of the expected growth, hospitals and healthcare systems of all types will need to be prepared to respond to a growth in new patients and patient requests by staffing their facilities with high-quality physicians, nurses, and non-clinicians who are ready to meet these challenges. And, considering that quality applicants in the healthcare industry are occasionally hard to come by, it should be noted that finding good healthcare staff members for hospitals begins with tried and true efforts by those in the hospital human resources department.

Common mistakes made by hospital human resources departments may result in hiring periods that take longer than expected, a surge of unqualified candidates applying for the job, and bad hires that eventually have to be let go at an additional cost to the hospital. The rest of this white paper describes the twelve most common mistakes hospital HR departments make when they begin the hiring process, with examples and advice drawn from conversations and interviews with a number of HR managers in the healthcare industry who have openly shared their knowledge and experience.

1. FAILING TO BE PROACTIVE.

When a hospital or healthcare facility begins the recruiting and hiring process, they're often responding to an immediate need. Physicians, CRNAs, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants leaving the hospital typically give a two-week notice. In some cases, they give a little more. And, although this is considered accepted and customary, it's often not a sufficient amount of time to recruit, interview, and hire a high-quality replacement for the hospital. Even with unemployment hovering around 7.5% in the U.S. (a 2013 statistical average), it might take 3 to 4 months for a hospital HR department to find a candidate that meets all their needs.

When your busy hospital doesn't have the luxury of time to seek out and hire a high-quality applicant for a key position, it's important to develop a proactive recruiting and hiring strat-

egy that helps anticipate future needs, develops an effective hiring process, and identifies characteristics of top-quality candidates before the need arises. And, although many hospitals frown on the idea of advertising job openings before the position is actually available, there's actually no harm in advertising and pre-qualifying candidates – as long as your advertising clearly states an *approximate* future start date. By taking a proactive approach to your recruiting and hiring efforts, you can begin to discover required characteristics and skills of future staff members, as well as develop relationships with potential candidates long before you actually require them.

A word of caution: good candidates aren't available on the market for very long before they're recruited to another healthcare facility. In some instances, when you find a candidate that suits your needs and fits your culture, it may be advantageous to *over-hire* for a short-term period of time to make certain your candidate isn't lost to a competing hospital.

2. NOT ACTING FAST ENOUGH.

HR departments that discover and hire top candidates to fill their open positions treat the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process as *Job 1*, because they rightfully assume that the best candidates are already in the process of getting hired elsewhere.

It should be stated, however, that *acting fast* does not mean *rushing* the process. An HR manager who is trying to fill a position with a high-quality, long-term hire has good reasons to avoid the temptation to rush a hire for a “near-fit” candidate. No hospital or healthcare facility benefits from hiring the first warm body that walks through the door. And, no hospital benefits from letting the résumés pile up on a desk. In other words, act fast when it comes to calling back top candidates, but take the time to hire smart.

3. NEGLECTING TO DEFINE THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE ROLE.

The recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process begins with a need – a staff member required to fill a vacancy or a new position in the hospital. Regardless of the position, this need cannot be adequately filled without a set of clearly-defined job requirements, duties, responsibilities, skills, and qualifications. As such, the process of recruiting high-quality candidates and selecting an appropriate hire from the talent pool begins with a thorough job analysis and description.

You cannot hire for a position that has not been defined, any more than you can treat a patient for a condition that has not been diagnosed. Without clearly-defined job requirements, you won't be able to write a clear job description. This, in turn, prevents the hospital from being able to attract and interview the right applicants. As an HR manager, it's your job to collect as much information about the duties, responsibilities, qualifications, and skills needed to perform the work. From this job analysis, you can define both the position and the type of candidate you require. In addition, you can use information gained from your job analysis to write your job description.

The job description assists you when you begin to plan a recruiting strategy. As always, the recruiting and hiring goal is to bring the right candidate into the open position at the hospi-

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tal. Whether you utilize an [online recruiting service](#), or advertise the open position on your hospital website, a clear and concise job description is essential to the recruiting process, because it is more likely to catch the attention of applicants who have the skills, education, and qualifications to perform the duties of the job. In other words, your next, most-qualified candidate is defined by the role they are stepping into.

4. DISMISSING STAFF FEEDBACK.

Few know the value of a high-quality staff member better than those who are charged with working alongside them at the hospital. A productive and harmonious hospital work environment relies on people who meet day-to-day objectives through collaboration. Staff members who give their personal best on the job, and meet their expectations, are often trusted by their co-workers. They are also seen as more enjoyable to work with than those who are not as well respected. Therefore, when you perform your job analysis and collect information about the duties, responsibilities, qualifications, and skills needed to perform the job, it's also a benefit to survey your current staff members about what they feel is needed for a future employee to succeed in the role. What your current staff thinks about the role you're trying to fill, and what qualifications a successful candidate should bring to the position, is invaluable information.

Solicit helpful staff feedback by asking what skills and abilities a new staff member should already have when stepping into the role at the hospital. In addition, ask them what *new* skills and talents might also benefit the role and the work environment. Keep in mind that the guiding aspect of your hiring process should be long-term thinking. Turnover is expensive. Highly-qualified candidates who meet the expectations of their co-workers on the job are more likely to settle in and perform well for the long-term.

5. PROLONGING THE PROCESS UNNECESSARILY.

It could be easily said that the process of recruiting and hiring a new physician, nurse, or non-clinician at a hospital is a job that few HR managers would want to belabor. Nevertheless, some hospital HR managers make the recruiting and hiring process a much more drawn-out experience than it needs to be – wasting valuable time that could be spent providing service to the facility and care to the staff members. This prolonging may be inadvertent in nature, but it's still a failing for those who have not taken the time to plan and organize the recruiting and hiring process so that it results in minimal impact on the hospital.

Be mindful of your time. There's no reason to amass a pile of résumés and call every applicant in for a face-to-face interview. If you've taken the time to write out clearly-defined job requirements and a comprehensive job description, you can prescreen your employment candidates with a simple job checklist against the individual skills and qualities listed on résumés. After the pool of candidates has been narrowed considerably, you can screen the remainder over the phone and determine whether their interests and salary expectations are in agreement with the position and the budget. A telephone interview will also help ascertain if the candidate will likely fit in with your hospital culture. It's not uncommon for

prescreening and preliminary phone interviews to help narrow down the initial candidate pool to the top 5 candidates. This streamlined process will save you hours of time, as well as shorten the time between job opening and job filling.

6. RUNNING A DISORGANIZED INTERVIEW.

When it comes to recruiting and hiring, as well as most other aspects of hospital HR management, disorganization often results in an eventual catastrophe. When it comes down to scheduling and holding face-to-face interviews, a highly-structured interview process is *essential* for creating consistency in the tools and data used to compare candidates. When in doubt, take a page from the playbook used by the recruiting and staffing professionals. Any professional human resources consultant or staffing firm will utilize a standardized interview process with well-thought-out job interview questions that have been drafted specifically to separate desirable candidates from average candidates. A thorough interviewing process will also help determine behavioral traits of candidates, which naturally lead to the selection of a candidate that best fits the hospital culture. Keep detailed notes on each interviewee. A checklist is valuable, in that it can systematize your interview process by allowing you to check off each desired characteristic and, in the end, evaluate what type of workloads each applicant can handle. Rank your candidates from strongest to weakest. Eliminate any who don't meet minimum requirements.

Then, after the first round of interviews are complete, hold additional interviews with the candidates who appear to be the most qualified for the open staff position. At this stage, it may be an additional benefit to create an interview team of carefully-selected staff members from a variety of departments. After the second round of interviews are completed, hold a debriefing with the staff members who participated in the interview process. This *team effort*, will likely allow you to receive a variety of feedback and a wealth of opinions on the top candidates.

7. FORGETTING TO CONSIDER THE WHOLE PERSON.

It's easy to understand that no single person can be defined solely by the contents of their résumé – *for better or worse*. Yet, some hospital HR managers will look at a perfect résumé and assume that the bearer will be an ideal fit for the position. This is rarely true, simply because people cannot be defined by their education, job history, and office skills. In some cases, a new physician or nurse at a healthcare facility may turn out to be a bad fit for the organization or the culture in the hospital because the HR manager jumped at a perfect résumé and failed to consider the whole person.

People are, by nature, a complex assortment of traits: interests, priorities, goals, concerns, desires, functions, and, *of course*, dysfunctions. And, given that people are constantly evolving and maturing, each of these traits is subject to change over time. As such, a behavioral assessment as part of the interview process can help ensure that a prospective candidate is capable of working well at the hospital as well as with their co-workers for long-term. When recruiting and hiring a new clinician or non-clinician for a hospital, most forward-thinking HR managers look for someone who has a background that fits the requirements of the job, as well as

interpersonal skills, written and verbal communication skills, an ability to take direction and work with a team, the ability to find and process information, and problem solving abilities. Unfortunately, none of these essential skills can be assessed, or even seen, on a résumé. These are the types of traits that become apparent (or not) when the new employee is observed on the job. But, a behavioral assessment of the prospective employee, prior to hiring, should be able to help determine if these much-desired traits are inherent and present.

Behavioral assessments are generally legal, as they stay well away from HR “hot topics” such as race, religion, marital status, etc. A professional behavioral assessment is simply a summary of responses to questions about employee strengths, work potential, and employee development needs. Many behavioral assessment software programs can be found on the Web with a simple Google search. In the end, hospital HR managers who want to hire based on a “whole person” evaluation are often benefitted by implementing a behavioral assessment as part of their hiring and career development program. Many hospitals that have seen a decrease in staff turnover and a strengthening of the workplace culture have these kinds of assessments to thank.

8. FAILING TO IMPLEMENT A SKILLS TEST PORTION OF THE INTERVIEW.

As mentioned in the above paragraph, there are certain skills and attributes that are desirable in a new hospital staff member (especially a non-clinician) that simply cannot be measured on a paper résumé. Depending on the nature of the position, these skills may include computer and software skills, filing skills, written communication skills, presentation skills, as well as the candidate’s ability to utilize critical thinking and make sound judgments. In most healthcare facilities, these skills and many more like them will come immediately into play when a new hire steps into the position. As these skills must be demonstrated to the interviewer to be verified, they require some form of pre-employment skills test.

Some of the most-common skills tests for healthcare-related jobs, outside of basic competencies related to the specific duties of the position, include skills with general office programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and Outlook. These software skills tests are easy to set up and run with computer equipment and software that the hospital already has on-site. Additionally, there may be a need to test written communications skills in each potential employee. In this era of tweets and text speak, there is a genuine need for employees who can craft a readable paragraph from well-selected words and phrases and clauses. As a skills test, you may want to have prospective staff members draft a letter to another department in the hospital via Microsoft Word, add a data set from Excel, attach the letter to an Outlook email, and send. This kind of test covers most office application needs in one easy-to-run assessment.

Although there are a number of skills tests any hospital HR manager can devise to authenticate a prospective candidate’s skill level, it should be stated that the process should be standardized and identical for every candidate, so as to maximize the value of the assessment without incurring any liabilities due to differences in testing.

9. OMITTING THE BACKGROUND CHECKS.

Although most would like to believe that medical professionals are inherently honest and *exactly* who they claim to be, this is sometimes not the case. A résumé may tell a lot about a person – in terms of their education, job history, skills and competencies, but some of that information may not be entirely true. According to separate investigations performed by *AOL Jobs* and *Forbes* magazine, some 46-53% of résumés hide untruths, a figure that most hospital HR managers will find absolutely startling.

Why do people list false or misleading information on their résumés? Staffing industry experts will give a plethora of reasons, but one of the most common is that some job applicants become desperate in times when unemployment is high and job availability is low. Therefore, outside of reviewing applications and credentials carefully, you should also consider performing criminal background checks, credit checks (where permitted by law), verifications on educational credentials, employment references, and actual jobs held. Speak to personal references when they are listed as well. Anything less invites frustration and potential liabilities.

10. DISREGARDING HOSPITAL CULTURE.

Every healthcare facility large and small has an internal culture. Although there are many definitions of culture, one of the simplest is “how we get work done.” Some hospitals get work done collaboratively, where decisions are made by consensus. Some get work done independently, where decisions are left to the individuals. Others may use a combination of the two. Some healthcare facilities, especially those that are larger and have numerous departments, communicate indirectly, through voicemail, text messages, or e-mail. Other, smaller hospitals may communicate directly, verbally. Some hospitals may hold staff meetings that are regularly scheduled and highly structured. Others may use a casual, informal format whenever the need arises. To determine your internal culture, it takes little more than a quick assessment of the structure of the work being performed and a look at those who are highly successful in their jobs.

A good culture fit is the candidate who is most likely to succeed in the hospital. When you have a culture that relies heavily on teamwork, collaboration, and routine communication, you don't want to hire a staff member who prefers to work alone. Your hospital culture defines your work environment. As such, it's important to recruit and hire staff members who can thrive in that specific environment.

11. BEING TOO CHARITABLE WHEN IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE CUTS.

Very simply, the decision to reject an applicant that doesn't suit the position should never be emotional one. This is why staffing professionals routinely advise hospital HR managers against recruiting friends and family members for open positions. As stated earlier, the guiding aspect of your hiring process should be long-term thinking. The candidate who is best qualified for the job, who has the skills required to perform the work, passes the background checks, and appears to be a great culture fit for your hospital is the one you should consider hiring first.

Good employees are valuable assets to the hospital. Eliminate anyone who doesn't meet the minimum criteria.

12. SITTING ON YOUR HANDS WHEN IT'S TIME TO MAKE AN OFFER.

Once again, acting fast is essential. The recruiting and interviewing process can be lengthy. Don't let all of that time and hard work go to waste when it's time to make an offer to a top candidate. After all of the interviewing, skills testing, background checks, and culture fit evaluations have been completed, and a decision has been made for a particular candidate, it's your duty to hasten the hiring process by making an offer.

Good candidates don't stay on the open market for very long. When an applicant is well-qualified for the position, and they are highly-motivated to find work, chances are they will attract interest from other healthcare facilities. Out of the 12 common mistakes hospital HR managers should avoid when hiring, sitting on your hands when it's time to make an offer is the most grievous.

SUMMARY

In summary, a high-functioning hospital is a well-balanced ecosystem of medical professionals and administrative staff members. When it comes to recruiting and hiring, the number-one priority for a hospital HR manager is to find top talent that benefits the overall work environment. And, although no set of practices and procedures will effectively *guarantee* that a new staff member hire will be a *perfect fit* for the hospital, there are certainly a number of steps an HR manager can take to mitigate the risk of a bad hire.

RESEARCH LINKS

1. <http://www.realmatch.com/EN/>
2. <http://money.usnews.com/money/careers/articles/2013/02/14/24-hot-and-hiring-healthcare-jobs?page=2>
3. <http://www.healthjobsusa.com/news/Common-hiring-mistakes-within-the-healthcare-field/1907.html>
4. <http://www.physicianspractice.com/staff/hiring-your-next-medical-practice-administrator>
5. http://humanresources.about.com/od/recruiting/tp/recruiting_employee.htm
6. <http://humanresources.about.com/od/recruiting/a/how-to-make-a-job-offer.htm>
7. <http://www.zeroriskhr.com/articles/eplic3.aspx>
8. <http://www.mommd.com/bcofficermanager.shtml>
9. <http://hiring.monster.com/hr/hr-best-practices/recruiting-hiring-advice/acquiring-job-candidates/how-to-hire-office-staff.aspx>
10. <http://asksabri.com/dental-practice-management-trouble-hiring/>
11. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970204422404576596630897409182>
12. <http://smallbusiness.foxbusiness.com/legal-hr/2013/08/05/want-to-hire-best-candidate-move-fast/>
13. <http://www.timsackett.com/2013/05/07/the-proactive-recruiting-myth/>
14. <http://info.profilesinternational.com/profiles-employee-assessment-blog/bid/116195/Small-Businesses-Act-Fast-But-Hire-Slow-and-Smart>
15. <http://www.greatplacetowork.com/our-approach/what-is-a-great-workplace>
16. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2013/10/11/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-20-something-employees/>
17. <http://youtu.be/2LjwMs0h6-I>
18. <http://www.tlnt.com/2013/04/02/12-interview-questions-that-will-reveal-the-very-best-candidates/>
19. http://www.forbes.com/2006/05/20/resume-lies-work_cx_kdt_06work_0523lies.html
20. <https://www.hrplus.com/Resources/HRPlusBlog/tabid/833/Article/5/why-background-checks-are-an-important-part-of-the-hiring-process-and-beyond.aspx>
21. <http://akraya.com/2013/08/how-to-prepare-for-a-job-interview-anticipating-skills-tests/http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Hiring-Nonprofit-Leaders/HiringTools/Making-Right-Hire-Assessing-Candidate-Fit.aspx#.UmrMcPmTh8E>
22. <http://www.proformative.com/articles/concerned-about-finding-new-hires-fit-your-company-culture>



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