

Narrowing the Pool of Job Applicants

While the availability of more candidates in the job market today may seem like a boon for employers, it also can present some challenges. The expanded pool coincides with a point at which the Internet has made it easier than ever to apply for positions. The result has been more resumes from unqualified individuals that managers must wade through to find the few candidates who meet their requirements.

Here are some steps that can help you hear from only the most appropriate applicants:

- **Be clear about your needs.** Use the job description for the position to create a specific employment listing. Job seekers should have no doubts about what you are looking for if you explain the essential criteria for consideration and what it takes to be successful on your team.
- **Tap into your network.** An excellent starting point when recruiting is to let your personal contacts know about your opening. Also ask your existing team if they know of suitable applicants. Employees understand your workplace culture well, and their recommendations are likely to be good ones. A special bonus paid out when a referral is hired may help to encourage participation.
- **Focus your search.** If you place your employment ads in industry publications and with professional associations, you will have more success targeting individuals with the necessary skills and experience. You may not receive the volume of responses you would on a major online job board, but, again, what you're after should be quality, not quantity.
- **Seek assistance.** Staffing firms are experienced at finding skilled talent and often know of individuals who aren't in the job market but might be willing to make a change for the right opportunity.

When you're already overwhelmed

Even if you've already initiated a search for candidates and found yourself overloaded with resumes, there are still ways to effectively narrow down the contenders. Larger companies employ scanning software that automatically screens resumes to narrow the field of applicants. If your company doesn't use this technology, you'll still need a manual system. Begin by using your employment posting as a checklist to eliminate individuals who don't meet all of your requirements. Remember not to focus exclusively on the resume; often the cover letter will give you additional information about a candidate's background and abilities that helps you make a better assessment.

Also, unless your company has a "no phone calls" policy that you specify on the employment listing, it's valuable to take note of the people who contact you to verify that you received their application materials. Individuals who follow up demonstrate initiative and sincere interest in the position. These are the applicants whose resumes you'll want to move to the top of the stack to review.

Once you've come up with your top contenders, colleagues familiar with your hiring needs can help you narrow your list further. Ask them to review the leading resumes and

offer their opinions. Do they see any warning signs of potential weaknesses with any applicants? What impresses them most about others?

Be careful about forming opinions too early. In a survey by Robert Half, 72 percent of senior executives polled said it is common for candidates with promising resumes not to live up to expectations during the interview. To save yourself time with face-to-face meetings, consider conducting brief phone interviews first. Taking this extra step can help you get answers to questions that may have come up for you when reading a resume and also determine whether there is an immediate rapport. This approach will allow you to invite only the best of the best to in-person interviews.

Managers are taking more time with the hiring process not only because of an influx of applicants but also to avoid costly hiring mistakes. That doesn't mean dragging out the procedure unnecessarily, though. It's key to evaluate resumes and initiate interviews as quickly as possible. The last thing you want to happen is to invest significant time assessing candidates only to lose your top selection because you waited too long to make a decision. The most skilled applicants may be in the running for multiple jobs, so you want to make sure you give your firm a strong chance at securing the talent it needs.

*For more career and management advice, listen to *The Management Minute*, Robert Half's podcast series, at www.rhi.com/Podcast.*

###