James Fields:

Six tactics to hire smart technology employees

Many employers make hasty decisions when hiring technology professionals. Here are six tips to keep your technology recruiting in tip-top shape.

1. Test for technical knowledge. There's nothing worse than hiring a technology professional who doesn't understand computers. Believe it or not, this happens more often than you'd think.

Hiring managers often look at what job prospects have self-reported on their résumés about work experience and projects, and make assumptions about what a particular candidate knows and what he or she will be able to do. The only way to actually discover an applicant's technical knowledge is to test it.

2. Test for skills. Equally important as testing for technical knowledge is testing for skills. If your company is hiring a Cisco network administrator, the candidate must not only have a mastery of Cisco hardware and software, but also design, problem-solving and project-management skills.

You may be faced with a job candidate who's a great architect

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but can't troubleshoot. Or someone who can follow predefined procedures but can't innovate. If your open position requires quick thinking and coming up with inventive solutions, you need to test for these skills as well.

3. Trust, but verify outside recruiters. Technology recruiting firms provide a valuable service by accessing talent that your company may not have access to, but when using an outside firm, you need to remember that the firm has revenue goals and sales quotes, too. A recruiting firm's primary goal is closing business.

To quickly close business, technology recruiting firms often fall in the same trap as internal hiring departments and fail to conduct an independent evaluation

of a particular candidate's skill set or capabilities. Just because a technology recruiter sends you a prospect that looks great on paper, don't assume that the candidate will be a good fit for your position.

4. Understand personality styles. You've worked hard to create a culture that's unique to your company and workforce. It's important to ensure that each prospective candidate who walks through your doors not only fits, but also adds to the environment that makes your organization special. Understanding the personality style of job applicants is critical to maximizing the likelihood of long-term success for a new technology professional.

We like using the DiSC personality assessment tool. DiSC measures a person's propensities toward dominance, influence, steadiness and conscientiousness. Certain jobs require certain personality strengths, and by knowing these, you can better place that individual in a job role that's suited for his or her natural tendencies.

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5. Recruit constantly. When you're desperate, you're more likely to make a short-sighted decision that you'll regret later. This applies to everything from Christmas shopping and booking a spring break trip, to making dinner reservations and hiring a technology employee.

If you're in serious need of a particular technology employee — as in, you needed that person to start yesterday — more times than not you will make an inferior hiring decision unless you already have candidates in the hopper.

Keep the recruiting and hiring engine idling at all times. Then when you are in need, just press the gas rather than firing up a cold engine. Do this by constantly marketing your organization to the technology community and have your recruiters constantly cultivate new relationships, even if you don't have a current opening for a candidate's specific skill set.

6.Treat contract employees with tact. With contract-to-hire positions it's easy to think, "This person isn't an employee, just a contractor. What do I care?" Contract employees can be more expensive than full-time employees, and they are just as likely to make costly technical mistakes and/or damage the culture of the organization, which means they need to be held to the same hiring rigor as full-time employees.

Be slow to hire — test, test and test some more — and quick to fire when necessary.