

# I Your Career

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## Finding the right person for the job

**It takes too much time and costs too much money to pick the wrong person for the job. Recruiting requires honesty from both sides, writes SIMON PANCKHURST.**

Jack Welch CEO of General Electric for 20 years wrote a whole chapter in "Jack" his autobiography about his successor and how that person was identified and groomed. Telecom's chief Teresa Gattung once commented that electing her senior management team was "one of the most important things I do".

It ain't rocket science.

Talented and motivated people are what make organisations successful. Products, services, systems and strategies are merely the outputs of clever people and will not outlast them. Recruiting good people is therefore critical.

And when we get it wrong it hurts.

Going through the recruitment has a direct advertising cost although the big cost is time. You don't want to recruit too often. While there will be variance across industries, recruiting more than once every two years for the same position is excessive.

Output both quality and quantity will range hugely from one individual to the next. Over months and years even a slight difference can add up. The difference between below average and average is significant, the difference between poor and fantastic is huge.

Take staff absences for example. There's those who will turn up when they shouldn't and those that don't turn up when they should. The prior consider sick leave as a safety net, the later as an entitlement to be fully utilized. When staff predominately share the entitlement view, you don't need to be a mathematician, it's costly.

When it's just not working out, exiting a poor performer results in significant productivity losses, wastes management time and ultimately legal fees and severance payments can be hard to avoid, not to mention the emotional costs. It's an expensive pill to swallow when an important investment turns sour.

However these costs pale in significance to the more difficult to measure implicit costs of getting recruitment wrong. A bad seed can have a hugely negative impact on staff morale and cause a cultural slide with particularly undesirable implications. Just like school days, the previously untainted can be unduly influenced by the dominant trouble makers with standards being dragged down rather than those struggling seeking to bring theirs up. Similarly negative or irritating personalities can eat away at the silent top performers the problem only emerging with resignations from those most valued.

While most staff embrace change with open arms, others will fight it with determination and persistence sadly lacking in their everyday approach to work. A subtle difference in outlook with not so subtle implications.

Poor staff will also make more mistakes. Some will create havoc requiring expensive rework while if their luck is down some will create a complete disaster. The difference between a staff member that remembers to check the smoke alarm batteries and one that takes a 'she'll be right attitude' normally doesn't matter. Some days aren't normal.

Customer service has never been so topical. I recently heard of a car salesman who was so aware of his colleague's poor record that he told a customer to ask only for him or a different colleague that he was confident would provide good service. Unfortunately my friend got the bad egg and was not particularly impressed when told he could only test drive a car if he was prepared to buy it. Surely a recruitment decision the yard owner must still be regretting.



Not funny: take the time and energy to recruit properly. Picking a clown will cost employees both time and effort. Photo: Fairfax

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So you've had your fingers burnt or heard of others misfortunes. But where to start?

It's not a way one process. Fit is critical. Most employees are capable of exceeding expectations if they are truly passionate about the role. You might need to do some hard selling.

Too often employers don't take the time and effort to truly explain; the purpose of the job, the day to day duties, the strategic aspects, and the opportunities to interact with others and develop. But don't just include the positive aspects. Be honest. Warts and all. Applicants are better to turn down a job offer than take 2-3 months to realize it's not the job they thought it was.

Look critically at your recruitment process. Is it structured and robust? Is it consistent with best practice? Does it require applicants to document and talk about their skills and attributes or does it test them.

Does Mr Henry and co select the All Blacks from reading CV's and interviews or get them to strut their stuff. Why should you do any different?

Testing doesn't mean an impractical job try out. A good 10 minute test will indicate a performance level that hardly changes as the test is extended beyond an hour. The interview is an essential tool for selling the organisation and creating a personal link. It should be part of the process not the whole process.

If you need to consider external human resource expertise, ask the right questions of recruitment consultants. How will they assess applicants? What concrete information will the process they recommend provide? What will they do to give you the confidence to ensure your recruitment decision is not a costly one?

It might pay to get it right first time. It's no fun when a quick fix turns into an expensive mistake.

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