

Solving the New-hire Mystery

BY CONNIE SWARTZ

Here are four clues to successful employee selection and training.

Building employee selection and training systems is simplified by thinking of the Hasbro board game Clue. You win the game by being the first to figure out: 1) Who 2) did the deed 3) with what and 4) where. These are the same four clues you need for successful employee selection and training.

Employee Selection

For employee selection, start by answering the first two Clue questions:

- **Who?** This is the person you select as your employee. To know who the right person is, start by answering the next question.
- **The Deed?** What is it that your employee needs to do? The better you define this, the easier it is to match a candidate to the job. If you're worried that this sounds like writing a job description, you're right. But writing a job description is not as awful as you think.

A simple job description only needs to include: the job title, the reason for the job, the outputs or outcomes of the job (must be measurable, observable and add value to the company performance) and minimum qualifications needed for the job.

If you have a job description for each job title you plan to hire for in the next year, you'll instantly have a better employee-selection system than most other small businesses (and even some large businesses).

With your job description in hand, it's much easier to identify what skills and knowledge a job candidate must have to qualify for consideration.

For example, consider this job description:

Title: Cake Decorator

Purpose: This employee is responsible for icing and decorating cakes for custom orders and for display and sale.

Outcomes:

- Prepare base icing for cakes

- Prepare accent icing for cakes
- Select edible decorations for the cakes
- Select inedible decorations for the cakes
- Apply base icing to a cooled cake
- Create script letters in icing on cake
- Create block letters in icing on cake
- Add decorative icing on cake
- Add edible and/or inedible decorations to cake.

It's "a cakewalk" to screen job applicants with this job description to guide you, and the questions for the job-related portion of the interview are nearly written for you.

If an applicant says she can perform the tasks required for the job, there's an additional step to help confirm her skills. Ask her to decorate a cake with a top-selling design. If she is able to meet your performance criteria (i.e., right colors, smooth base icing, well-positioned letters and decorations), you have an employee who matches the job and can start providing value to your business on the first day.

Training

Picture yourself with a brand new employee. This is when you work with the other two clues:

- **What?** What does the employee need to know and do to be successful in her new job?
- **Where?** The new employee needs to be introduced to the new work environment, culture and other employees.

New employees typically go through an orientation. Small company orientation training can be casual and loosely structured. A topic outline, reference materials and some planned, directed one-on-one sessions might be all that's needed. Both a general orientation to the company and job-specific orientation are typically given to new employees. Orientation to the company might include a tour of the facilities, information about company

benefits and policies, and introduction to office technologies, such as e-mail and voice mail systems.

Job-specific orientation might include a departmental tour and introduction of team members, explanation of current projects and activities, the new-hire's role, what the new employee needs to do and when, and where to find information and assistance.

After orientation, job-specific training might be needed to fill gaps between current skills and the unique skills needed to be successful in your company. For example, the new cake decorator needs direction on how orders come in, where to find them and how to clean up.

Existing skills may need to be refined to meet your standards. The new employee may need instruction on how to operate equipment, and may need to be shown how to do each task. He then can practice doing it with guidance and feedback until you are satisfied with the finished product. New-hire training in a small company is normally informal and may span several days or weeks.

Mystery Solved

Following these four clues helps you be more confident in your selection and helps the new employee be more successful in your company.

You win because you have selected the right employee. The employee wins by learning about the job and the new company. Both you and the employee know 1) who, 2) is going to do what deed, 3) how they are going to do it, and 4) where. Everyone is clued in—no mystery here.

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