Streamlining the hiring process

Job postings can result in hundreds of applicants during this economic downturn. Here is a way to reduce the time and costs of hiring, and find the very best person for the job.

H istorically, education employees have been hired after a process that consists of these steps: determining the need for a position, posting the vacancy, paper-screening applications, an interview with a panel or committee, background check, reference calling, and finally the selection of a candidate. This is a very time-consuming and costly process.

The current economic downturn means hundreds of workers apply for each job posting. As the director of human resources at a large county office of education, I believed there had to be an effective way to reduce the applicant pool to a reasonable number. My challenge was twofold: identify the candidate who would best fill the position and reduce the cost to my department for the many hours involved in the process of screening and interviewing many candidates.

In reviewing the applications during our paper-screening process, I noted they all met the minimum qualifications. Further, since our office uses the ED-JOIN On-line Application System, the application is standardized, with the only differences appearing within the at-

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tachments (letter of introduction and letters of recommendation). Since many applicants appear to possess the appropriate qualifications for a position, we needed an effective, cost-saving method to determine if the applicant would be the "right fit" for a department. I believed that a more collaborative, inclusive approach would increase the likelihood that the best candidate would be identified and hired.

Our new hiring process

The DASSH (DePrater Additional Screening for Selection and Hiring) process was developed to help reduce costs and time spent. Prior to the posting and screening process, staff members who will be working directly with the applicant compile a list of the characteristics and traits they believe the ideal person should possess to be successful. The job is posted with some of those descriptors on ED-JOIN for 10 working days. The department director then paper-screens the applications and selects people he or she would like to consider. One of the advantages of this process is that many more applicants may participate.

"Speed session" interviews

The interview session is referred to as the "speed session" due to the format. Members of the department that has the vacancy develop questions relating to the characteristics and traits identified. The selection committee will use some (or all) of these questions during the speed session. In addition, the department director may wish to have the selection committee meet and brainstorm the questions they would like to ask the applicants during the speed session.

This provides an added opportunity for the department to meet, provide input, and feel valued for being asked to participate in the process. The selection committee is invited to participate in the speed session and each individual is given roles and responsibilities.
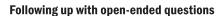
The speed session is scheduled for 10 to 12 applicants who all report at the same time. The number of applicants in a session is equal to the number of individuals from the selection committee who are assigned the role of questioning. The number of questions identified by the department determines how many individuals from the selection committee are assigned the questioner role.

Applicants report to a room and are given a brief introduction to the position and the organization. The applicants are then taken into the speed session room, where each member of the selection committee is sitting at an individual station set up at the perimeter of the room. Applicants are given two minutes at each station to respond to a question and then, at the ring of the bell, they are asked to move to the next station. The selection committee member asks each applicant the same question. This process continues until the applicant has moved to each individual station and answered each question. Once completed, applicants are given a card thanking them for their participation and providing them information for the remainder of the interview process.

After the speed session, a debrief meeting is held with the selection committee for feedback. A major point to reinforce with the selection committee is that they are not making a decision for a person to be hired at this point. The speed session screening is merely an opportunity to determine if the selection committee agrees that an applicant may be the right fit with the team and possesses the characteristics/traits identified as needed to be successful in the position.

Moreover, the speed session provides the selection committee an opportunity to see if they make a personal connection with the applicant. After the debrief session, the department identifies a smaller number of applicants to be invited to return for a more lengthy interview process.

Following up with open-ended questions

For the follow-up interview, the interview panel should ask open-ended and situational questions, giving the interview committee the chance to see how the applicant may respond to a proposed realistic issue. An example of a question may be along the lines of, "A student is being disruptive during the teaching of a lesson. How would you respond? And if the behavior continues, what would you do next? And if the behavior still continues, then what?" This gives the interview committee an opportunity to see how the applicant thinks and how they may have reacted to similar situations in the past, instead of asking the traditional questions about background and experience.

The bottom line

The DASSH process has been welcomed by our administrators and support staff – in addition to other educational agencies with which we have shared the process – as a way to save time and reduce costs while finding the best candidate. ■

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