Buyer's Remorse

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In a thought-provoking “CEO to CEO” feature article in the September/October 2010 edition of Associations Now magazine, four CEOs were asked: “If you could take back one business decision you’ve made in the last five years, what would it be?” Three of the four answers revealed regret in the area of **human resources**. In one instance a CEO delayed the difficult decision of terminating a poor performer. In the second case an executive director acknowledged the downsides of promoting a staff member to a position beyond his capability. And the third of four CEOs surveyed recounted the regret that ensued when she hastily hired her third choice in the applicant pool after the top two applicants turned down the job.

Every consumer has at one time or another experienced “buyer’s remorse.” On occasion I’ll second guess a purchase while standing in the checkout line. This happens most frequently at the grocery store! In a couple of recent cases I’ve discovered an out of style garment with the tags still attached hanging in my closet—a sure sign that my initial purchase was a bad idea.

Buyer’s remorse in the context of human resources may occur with greater-than-we-are-willing-to-admit frequency. During a presentation on ***managing human resource risk*** last week I asked members of an audience how many of them had faced a lawsuit alleging illegal or wrongful employment practices. Not a single hand was raised. When I asked if anyone in the room had made an ill-fated hiring decision, nearly every attendee hoisted an arm into the air. Several attendees seemed to be waiving at me and appeared eager to share their hiring mishap.

Although I’m convinced that there is no fool-proof way to *eliminate* the risk of a poor match between position and applicant, I’m equally certain that there are steps you can take to increase your chances of a good match and reduce the likelihood of frustration and regret. My tips include:

- **Revisit and update the position description**: It’s unwise to begin any recruitment process with a dated position description. A better approach is to revisit the document and determine if changes are needed to make the description of duties and requirements both accurate and reflective of your current needs. What has changed since you last filled the position? What have you learned from your experience supervising prior occupants of this key role? Clarity and honesty are virtues in human resources, and especially so in the position description. Make certain the position description offers an accurate picture of the job and how it fits within the nonprofit.
- **Involve your entire team in the process**: Many supervisors see recruitment and selection as their

exclusive responsibility. A better approach is to involve the people that will be required to work with the new recruit in updating the position description and brainstorming about the key qualities and capabilities required to succeed in the job. Never keep the process a secret from other members of your team. Get your staff team involved early in the process. You'll not only benefit from their insights, you'll increase the chance these experienced team members will welcome your new recruit *and* feel motivated to help the new employee succeed.

- **Avoid the temptation to skip steps**: Over the years I've heard countless stories of woe and HR remorse from leaders who in-advisedly skipped steps in their customary recruitment or hiring process. Follow the adopted screening process in your nonprofit without exception, and never allow yourself to be so charmed by an applicant that you skip a vital step such as reference checks!
- **Slow down**: Although the departure of a valued employee may appear to have left a gaping hole, don't rush the recruitment process simply to get someone on board. Remind yourself that discharging a new hire that you later discover is unsuitable could consume *months* of your precious time and hasten your aging process. It's far better to take your time at the front end and find the applicant most likely to succeed in the position and in the organization. You owe it to the mission of your nonprofit (and your hope of aging gracefully!) to exercise care and stay within a reasonable speed limit.

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