

Talent Acquisition & Acceleration

I continue to hear from club owners and managers around the world that, “finding good people” is one of their greatest challenges - especially for leadership positions, such as General Managers and Department Directors. In contrast, there is virtually unanimous agreement that “people” are the key to success and one of the greatest assets of any organization.

Unfortunately, clubs all too often fail to put forth their best efforts in recruiting and securing top talent. Due to the pressure of unforeseen position vacancies, the need to cover certain shifts, lack of quality applicants, or simply a lack of focus regarding the importance of the hiring process, results can be mixed. Maximizing the chances of hiring exemplary employees that fit your club’s culture can make a tremendous difference in the day-to-day “vibe” and also the overall business performance. For all the talk about hiring for fit, there is still too much emphasis on technical skills and experience when it comes to interviewing and selection.

Following are some reminders that may help your organization become better at securing future superstars.

Interview Hard – Manage Easy: Really, let this time worn advice sink in. Concentrating efforts on the front end of the relationship with a potential employee can save months, or even years, of ongoing managerial frustration. Interviewing “hard” means mobilizing the club’s resources – priorities, time, finances, technology, staff members, and cultural mores – to ensure the “right” hiring decision is made. It also suggests that the interview itself should be a challenging process. Quickly filling out a job application online or onsite, having a brief “conversational” interview, and offering the job on the spot sets the bar extremely low. Not only will this scenario likely result in a meager outcome, it also doesn’t leave the candidate feeling like they “earned” the opportunity. Individuals joining the club team should believe that it is a selective process and takes something special at all levels of the organization.

First Impressions Count: This is true, not only for the candidate, but also for the organization. Make sure the front desk is expecting the candidate, and you are on time and prepared for the interview. Candidates quickly pick up on the professionalism, level of customer experience, friendliness, and team atmosphere during their visit. Planning a second, or even third, in-person interview is always a good idea, so that you can evaluate their timeliness, appearance, mood, and responsiveness on a different day. It also allows your team a chance to

reflect on the initial interview and follow up on anything that prompted reservations or was left uncovered.

Homework Works: Creating a purposeful hurdle for candidates to clear can be a powerful hiring tool. Some companies have found that just sixty percent of applicants are even willing to complete a basic homework assignment. This finding alone should be motivation enough to creatively implement a strategy that weeds out those not committed enough to complete a discovery exercise. This assignment could be as simple as answering a few essay questions, responding to a case study with recommended solutions, or watching a video online /reading a short book and sharing pertinent takeaways. Ideally this activity will offer the candidate insight about the organizations values, as well as offer the company insight about the individuals' character and knowledge.

Ask Insightful Interview Questions: As the old saying goes, "hire for attitude, train for success". A more current mantra is "hire for values and company fit". Learning how to gain this insight is a skill many health club professionals are not very experienced with. Since most clubs don't have the luxury of a dedicated HR person, it's imperative that staff members involved in the interview process receive coaching in this regard. One easy way to assist your team is to provide them a

list of “recommended interview questions” that elicit responses which reveal a candidates personal values and traits. For example; “If I were to come over to your house, what would your house tell me about you?” or, “Think about a time that you went home from work and were thinking “I love my job”. Describe what happened that day.” or, “Which of our organizations core values do you feel most closely aligned with and why?”

Multiply Your Chances: Make sure numerous team members are involved in the interview process to take advantage of collective impressions. All of us bring our own perspectives and subconscious biases to the interview table and involving others helps mitigate the likelihood of a shortsighted hiring decision. At a minimum, the supervisor, General Manager, Department Director, and a future co-working peer should be included. Sessions with these interviewers can happen one-on-one, or in a group setting. Even team members not scheduled to be part of the process should be coached to offer feedback about the recruit. How the candidate interacts during their visit with; the front desk staff, other employees, and members can be tremendously insightful.

Set & Share Expectations: From the very beginning, in the position description, clearly outline the type of employee you are seeking. Not just the education and experience required, the technical competencies

needed, or the jobs essential duties, but also the foundational club wide values. Establishing performance expectations (on both sides) starts before the candidate is ever hired – even if it is passive discovery. Review the position description in detail, spending ample time on the overriding cultural values, and encourage the potential employee to ask questions. I’m convinced it is also a good idea to let new team members know the top 3-4 things their performance will be evaluated upon. Remember that after all is said and done - you get what you demand and encourage what you tolerate.

Extend an Invitation: Once you are confident and excited about your selection, instead of “offering” the candidate a “job”, extend them an “invitation” to “join the team”. Nuances perhaps, but the language you use reinforces the unique opportunity that awaits. Invite them to be part of the club community, and the club’s cause. When individuals accept an invitation to be part of something, they are more likely to give their commitment, not just their compliance.

Hire From Within: Most club operators adhere to this philosophy as much as possible, although more likely due to convenience than perfect fit, and often to the organizations detriment. Promoting internally is a sustainable strategy only when programs are in place to groom and prepare current team members for the next

step. Awarding positions to employees that have performed well in one area, does not always guarantee their success in another. Club's that consistently grow from within typically have in place continuing education platforms, mentorship / partner programs, and other coaching systems that identify team members strengths and support advancement.

With a little planning and forethought, hiring from within can be a tremendous advantage. In fact, research suggests that external hires are sixty one percent more likely to be fired from a job than internal promotes. In addition to the necessary hiring for open positions, many clubs are finding high quality candidates through accredited college internships, onsite fitness certifications, and alliances with education providers.

Elevate the On-Boarding Experience: Once the invitation to join your organization has been accepted, its time to lay the foundation for their work life experience with your company. Keep in mind that, although you may be almost constantly hiring new employees, for them this is a singular "big deal". Think about when you have started a new job and the feelings of nervousness, excitement, and curiosity that may have been present. Make the extra effort to extend a warm welcome to new team members:

- Send a congratulatory note /gift to their home
- Have the Owner / GM write them a personal note
- Give them a club logo item(s)

- Make sure someone is available to greet them upon arrival
- Provide a schedule for their first day / week
- Schedule a one-on-one meeting with the GM
- Ensure they have a lunch partner
- Introduce them to the team
- Consider assigning a mentor
- Begin the new employee orientation / training process
- Follow up with them at the end of the day

The most memorable time in an employee's career, and the time with the biggest impact, is the first days on a new job.

Prepare for Personalization: During or after the interview process, ask “getting to know them” questions such as; “what are your hobbies?”, “if you could have an unlimited gift card to any store, which one would it be?”, or “what do you like to do for fun outside of work?”. Record their answers to these questions and when the opportunity arises in the future to reward their performance, personalize the reward based on this information. This simple habit helps introduce the wow factor into recognition.

Winning the war for talent and accelerating the engagement of new team members is more important than ever in today's hyper competitive landscape.

Bringing the “right” people into your organization, and keeping the “wrong” ones out deserves top priority. Consider implementing some of the ideas shared above to increase your chances of sustaining a successful team. If possible, take it a step further and dedicate a staff meeting(s) to developing your interview processes / systems and providing coaching on the nuances of interviewing.