

Applicant Overload: Sifting Through Resumes to Find the Right Candidate

You'd be amazed at all the resumes sitting on someone's desk or inbox that haven't been looked at even once. Or perhaps not if you are one of the thousands of hiring managers whose schedule has increased over the past several months leaving you overwhelmed and in desperate need for a vacation you don't have time to take. The reality is hiring managers are buried with work and desperately need to hire someone to help, but they simply don't have time to go through the mounds of resumes they are receiving.

According to Dice.com, applicants per job posting are up 81% in early 2010.

Great candidates are going untouched, or worse, to competitors, while hiring managers continue to become more and more overloaded. If the pile of incoming resumes is growing out of control, rather than continuing to "drown," follow these simple steps to get your head above water.

First, if you already have one or more internal recruiters, make sure they are following the steps below to streamline the resume review process and make it as efficient as possible. If you do not have internal recruiters, consider hiring one. If a direct hire is currently out of the question, there are many good contract recruiters willing to help until you reach your hiring goals. Remember -- hiring someone without a recruiting background can often backfire since your goal is to only interview the best candidates. Seasoned recruiters are trained to locate not only candidates with great skills, but also the complete package for what you need.

Finding a reputable contingency recruiting firm is another option, and in today's economy, many are willing to negotiate their fees. In recruiting, contingency means free unless you decide to hire one of their candidates. Typical direct placement fees range from 20-30% of the candidate's annualized salary, but most firms will at least consider discounting their fees during these hard times in hopes of repeat future business with you. If you have several hiring needs, a "volume" discount is often in order. Give them an exclusive for the first several weeks and they'll be so happy they'll discount their fees AND focus only on you during that time. The only catch is you have to make time to provide clear and timely feedback so you can both reach your mutual goal of finding the right candidates for the job.

Whether an internal or external recruiter is going through your resumes, or if the job falls to you, some tips to quickly go through resumes will help. This is by no means an end-all list nor is it perfect, but it should save the reviewer some time and ultimately result in a quicker, more precise hire for your job opening.

1. **Create Piles.** In your home, garage or office, it's all the same – creating piles will help you *feel* more organized even if you've only distributed the items from one place to another. The key is to determine your categories and distribute the resumes to the right pile (email folders or hard copy files) as they come in or designate a time to go through them and stick to it.
2. **Use Prequalifying Questionnaires.** This is such a handy, time-saving tool. Just create a short list of questions that will auto-generate to any resume coming into an email address or directly through your website and this will rule candidates in and out quickly. Just remember to make them simple yes/no or multiple choice so you won't have to read essay answers that could become time consuming.
3. **Prioritize Your Priorities.** Admit it, you have at least 10 different things on your to do list and all are a Number One Priority. OK. But there has to be something that can be deemed the most critical when considering candidates. Whether it is location, industry, education, job-specific experience or something else, pick what is the most important criteria. This will be your line in the sand to help you make the decision on which candidates to move forward on and which to put in a file for future roles.

4. **Be Cautious of Red Flags.** These can be things like changing jobs too often, gaps in employment or spelling or grammatical errors in a resume. Someone who changes jobs often could only be looking for the highest bidder and will leave you as soon as they get a better offer. Someone who has been laid off time and again could be due to being a low performer. There are always exceptions to the rule, of course. For example, someone may have taken six months off to care for their ailing family member. Should you take a chance and interview a “red flag” candidate, it’s best to start with a phone interview to determine if you feel they have *reasons* or *excuses* before you bring them in for a face-to-face.
5. **Look for Accomplishments vs. Duties.** Not that listing duties is a bad thing, but accomplishments say so much more. It indicates the person is goal oriented and understands the importance of reaching those career objectives. Everyone has job duties, but not everyone has significant accomplishments. Remember that past performance is an indicator of future performance. With that in mind, strong performers who achieve, and even exceed, their previous goals and objectives will potentially pay off in gold for your company.
6. **Remember the “Perfect” Candidate Doesn’t Exist.** We all wish they did, but they simply do not. For that reason, look for a “Great Candidate.” Great candidates are ones who have most of what you’re looking for, including the critical things you determined in step number three of this list. Great candidates may not have 100% of what you need, but what they don’t know, they can learn and learn quickly. Granted, it’s challenging to tell that from only a resume, but it’s not impossible. Look for candidates who have a progressive work history who have been promoted consistently. Look for thoroughness and attention to details (hint, it won’t be a candidate with grammatical or spelling errors). Go a step further and look them up on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) or another professional networking site to see if they have a slew of positive recommendations. Recommendations show they are serious about their career, their current and/or former colleagues and superiors feel they have done a good job, and they can play well with others.

Again, this list is not exhaustive, but it will help make the resume review process go more quickly and make you feel less overloaded in the process. Your goal of finding the right candidate will be right around the corner and, if you’re lucky, maybe that much-deserved vacation, too.

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