

How My Friend Fixed My New Hire Problem – Part 1

By: Louise S. Dunn



Description: Interviewing, meeting, evaluating, hiring, training...fixing...fixing...firing, hiring.... The cycle becomes exhaustive and frustrating. Sometimes, all it takes is for an outsider to walk through your system and you discover a few easy tweaks to streamline your process and remove the risk of the revolving door of hiring employees.

To implement an effective new hire procedure you must know your business history and use it to make your hiring strategy more productive. Once you have achieved a great hiring strategy, you must move to creating a training plan that is not only good for the new hire, but also beneficial for you and your trainer as well. Finally, not all performance appraisals are created equal; you must develop coaching, appraisals and career mapping strategies to grow your new hire and the business.

The story following is a 3-part series about Claire*, a hospital manager driven to the brink of insanity because of complaints about new hires. *The names have been changed to protect the innocent (ala the TV show “Dragnet” style).

Here We Go Again

“Claire, we are still having problems with Chris and now you can add Tom to that list.” Dr. Jeffers announced to the managers at their monthly management meeting. “Fix them or fire them.” Claire sat silent – going over the past 6 months. Chris was hired to replace a seasoned team member who quit because she felt she wasn’t being compensated for her level of knowledge. Tom was just hired three weeks ago to prepare for the busy summer season; he had just completed his training. Discouraged, Claire told the managers they would meet tomorrow to discuss the situation.

Later that evening, Claire found herself venting to her good friend while the children were at soccer practice. “I can’t keep killing time interviewing and training. It seems all I do is run an ad, review resumes from 50 people who always wanted to ‘work with animals’ only to hire a problem! Where are all the great employees I hear about at conferences?” Janice listened to Claire recount issues with the recent new hires, as well as previous hires and all the complaints the other team members dumped on her lap. “Claire, you keep telling me how you change up your routine every time you go to hire someone because of the issues you experienced with the last hire.” Janice then went out on a limb and said to her friend, “Maybe the problem isn’t the people you interview but instead, it is your routine and procedures.”

Janice and Claire arranged to spend an afternoon digging into the thick of Claire’s procedures and protocols. What developed next wasn’t a complete overhaul of what Claire did, but more of a fine-tuning and improving of her procedures related to hiring, training and evaluating. In the end, Claire had a stronger plan that not only improved the quality of new hires, but also provided a strengthened career path for team members and an improved bottom line for the business.

You Get What You Advertise For

“OK Claire, when you need a new tech what do you do first?” asked Janice. “I write my job ad – Vet Tech wanted. Must be available nights and weekends. Great benefits. Call...” Claire’s voice trailed off as she noticed Janice’s puzzled expression. “You get what you advertise for,” said Janice. “And what I hear is that you want someone to work nights and weekends. Is that it?” “Well, no, not exactly. Right now, I need someone primarily in exam rooms and lab.”

Janice then walked Claire through a process of assessing the needs of the business and writing a job analysis. “This initial step will help you formulate your job posting and specific interview questions,” said Janice. Claire first considered the needs of the business.

The last strategic planning session for the business briefly mentioned about utilizing cross-functional teams and developing subject matter experts (SME) in certain areas of the business. “Note-to-self,” said Claire, “include a talent strategy at the next strategic planning meeting!” Evaluating the notes from that last session, Claire noticed that many of her current team strengths were already in the areas of exam rooms and lab, yet surgery was weak on available personnel. Instead of advertising for a tech – a “warm body” – she really needed to look at the current team and the plan for SME and cross-training, then she could decide what she needed to hire. Hiring Chris or Tom would have been fine if the plan was to work them in the exam and lab area – thus training them in those areas, but instead, they were trained in everything and anything resulting in knowing a little about everything but not being an expert in anything. The rest of the team, thinking the new hires were trained, placed additional pressures on the new hires when there was poor performance in surgery or a lack of knowledge about lab tests.

“Now you can formulate a job analysis,” said Janice. Claire could only roll her eyes. She had tried writing job descriptions before and usually ended up with pages of duties. Janice then explained to Claire that a job analysis was different from a job description. A job analysis is a fact-finding process to identify critical

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incidences and situations that the applicant will encounter (Latham). Although closely related, the job description is written after the job analysis and adds a list of duties and responsibilities, who to report to, what the working conditions are and what qualifications are needed.

Claire spent some time researching how to conduct a job analysis. Her new protocol involved talking to a few key employees (SME) about specific duties and responsibilities, amount of time spent doing those tasks, typical interactions encountered between co-workers and clients, and what behaviors made the difference between a poor performer and a great one (Latham). Claire was now ready for the next step – writing the ad.

Reaching the People Who Need to Hear About the Job

“So, I guess advertising for a tech who loves working with animals isn’t the best opening line?” Claire said to Janice. Claire thought about all those resumes she received from people who talked more about their pets and how much they always wanted to work with animals. “No wonder I was overloaded with applicants who weren’t right for the job.” Claire and Janice worked out a few job notices while enjoying a latte and donut.

Some phrases Claire thought were useful were:

- Candidate must demonstrate strong technical skills in exam room protocols and lab procedures.
- Candidate must be comfortable talking to pet owners, as well as communicating with other colleagues both within the practice and with those at referral practices.
- Familiarity with digital radiographs, laser therapy and exotics a plus but not necessary.
- Available to work flexible hours including evenings, weekends and some holidays.

Claire now had more specific wording for her next job ad, one that highlighted major job duties the candidate would encounter.

In addition to having the written ad, Claire explored different ways of getting the word out about the job opening. Simply placing a newspaper ad was no longer enough for the search for an ideal candidate. Social Media now had to play a larger role in her efforts. Janice encouraged Claire to speak with other hospital managers to find out where they had success in their searches.

In addition to the local paper and industry career centers (AVMA, etc), Claire posted on the practice’s Facebook, the State’s veterinary medical association newsletter, the State’s technician association newsletter, job postings at various technical colleges and Craig’s List. Claire was now ready to sit back and let the resumes roll on in until Janice interrupted her with yet another task.

Interviewing for Great Results

“What are you going to ask these candidates when you meet them?” asked Janice while the two of them exercised at the gym. “Well, since I have a more targeted group of candidates I won’t be overloaded with interviews and I will be able to spend more time getting to know them,” replied Claire. “So interview me,” challenged Janice. “You can practice on me.”

Claire went through her standard opening questions – “Tell me about yourself.” “Why are you interested in working for us?” Janice pointed out that, although Claire will learn something about the candidate, she won’t know much about their behavior on the job. She guided Claire back to the job analysis and job description for more interview questions that were situational and not so unstructured (Latham).

Situational questions are those questions that ask the applicant to talk about what they would do when faced with a specific dilemma. Claire began to consider situations in the past that clearly pointed out to her when there was a wrong fit between a person and the job. Not only did she consider questions, she also began to formulate a scoring guide – best answer, acceptable answer and poor answer.

A few examples were:

- “You are in the exam room with a Dalmatian puppy. The client is opposed to any discussion about castrating the dog even though he has no intention to breed the dog. How do you respond to his argument?” (Ranked responses:
1- It is the client’s decision 2- I would tell them the benefits of the surgery
3 – I would discuss risks and show them how to check their dog for any changes)
- “You are working with Dr. A on a case. The doctor criticizes you for being too slow at placing an IV catheter. How do you respond to this?”
- “You overhear a receptionist giving incorrect information to a client over the phone. What would you do in this situation?”
- “Can you recall a time when you had to take on a leadership role within an organization or a team? What did you do?”

Once she and Janice finished interviewing each other, Claire had ten strong questions with ranked responses. The questions were relevant to the position being offered and would offer to Claire some indication about prior behaviors of the applicant, as well as how the applicant would handle certain situations common to the job they are applying for.

In the end, Claire had revamped and strengthened her hiring procedure. She would be able to involve her management team and certain “experts” in the practice to assist her with the job analysis, job description and interview questions. She also had some new ideas for setting up a tiered interview structure involving her team in conducting interviews over the phone, in person and in a working interview. No longer would she spend hours sifting through resumes or interviewing the wrong

people for the job. Armed with a strategy that matched the business strategy, Claire was ready to get the right person on the bus!

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References

Latham, G.P. 2011. *Becoming the Evidence-Based Manager: Making the Science of Management Work for You*. Davies-Black: Boston.

Example: Job Analysis

1. Gather information from prior documents regarding job descriptions and performance standards. Meet with a few “subject matter experts” (SME) – techs currently working the job and able to describe duties and critical skills needed to perform the job. List the tasks and competencies needed to perform this job based on information gathered. Some tasks or competencies will be considered critical, others will be optional (or not necessary at an entry level).

2. Job Title: _____ Supervisor for this Position:

Brief Description of the Job (main purpose, reason for this position):

Duties:

Critical Skills, Knowledge, Abilities and Personal Attributes to perform this Job:

SKA	Critical	Optional	Notes
Flexibility	X		Emergency cases require a change in work schedule. Business is open to serve clients 8AM- 9PM and on weekends.
Multi-Task	X		Numerous patients at various points of receiving services and under the direct care of this technician requires an ability to be organized, thorough and precise.
Teamwork	X		
Knowledge of computer program:		X	Helpful to know our PMIS but we will provide training on our system. It is critical to have a comfort operating a computer
Surgical procedures			

0-1 years experience

Current student

1-3 years

High School Diploma / GED

3-5 years program

Graduate of veterinary technology

5+ years

Certified veterinary technician

Physical Requirements:

Lifting at least 40 lbs on a daily basis, up to 75lbs

Walking, standing, lifting, restraining, sitting, hearing, speaking

Special concerns/Hazards:

