Steps to Take When Hiring a Consultant

Navigating a dynamic and complex business world is no easy task. If you have been in business any length of time your company has managed to overcome all kinds of issues and challenges. As you face new challenges there is a good chance some of those trials will be best addressed with the help of outside assistance.

The benefits of being well-prepared when "onboarding" a consultant include:

- Increasing the probability of a positive experience for those involved.
- Preventing costly mistakes.
- Improving the likelihood the project will completed on time and within budget.
- Boosting earnings boost the company.

Below are some simple tips on how to drive the hiring process for the best results.

Clearly Define Your Objective

The most important part of preparing for a new role or project is to clearly identify and develop specific objectives for the project or assignment. Clarity is the key. It serves two purposes: it helps you hire the right person for the job, which in turn will ensure you get what you're expecting from the role or project. Don't worry if you're unable to refine all of the details, your candidate can help with that. Just make sure you understand and are able to articulate your main goals and the skills required for success.

Assess Your Existing Resources

Be sure the person for the job isn't already on staff. If you have a current employee in mind for the role, the next steps are to determine:

1. They are qualified to take on the project.
2. They have the time to successfully complete it.

It's easy to create unpleasant situations when someone is pressured with an added workload they simply don't have the bandwidth to complete.

Equally discouraging is being overlooked when an outsider swoops in to take over. If you have capable staff, make sure they get a fair shot at the role or project.

Which Approach Is Right For You?

Consultants generally approach assignments in two manners – one is knowledge based and the other is people based. The former is basically an expert working for you and is ideally suited for

uncomplicated or technical tasks. The latter are consultants who work with you and the community at large. Choosing the right approach for your project will mean better results.

Delineate A Timeline

Establish a timeframe for completing your project. Outlining the expectations and objectives with specific target dates serves multiple needs. It gives framework for those participating to follow, it enables the consultant to keep you on track, and it also helps your organization stay on budget. A popular tool designed for this purpose is the Gantt chart. Through it, you can develop milestones, monitor progress and look ahead as your project moves forward. Other scheduling and project management tools can offer similar benefits.

Performance Appraisal

Finally, consider reviewing your consultant's performance just as you would an employee's. It's not a common practice due to the extra time it takes. However, the process sets the stage for a healthier and more long-term relationship with your consultant. A conscientious consultant striving to meet his or her clients' needs should be open and may even encourage this type of feedback.

Accommodating special projects or working through challenges over and above your already busy agenda can leave you wondering if they're worth the effort. However, with the right planning process in place your experience working with consultants will boost productivity, reduce staff burnout and add to the bottom line.