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# Focus

A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group



## Hiring for Keeps

An Addams Construction Company Fable

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Gatwell fussed with the tubing, making final adjustments to the alternate-fuel truck he had been building. His excitement grew as he envisioned how Lurch would praise his creative solution to the rising cost of gasoline. Then the cow exploded.

Morticia normally enjoyed funerals, but she was in a somber mood as she rode home from Gatwell's graveside service. Employee turnover at Addams Construction Company had been steadily rising, and as head of human resources Morticia was feeling increasing pressure from the president to meet staffing demands. Although most employees left in a less dramatic fashion, Gatwell's departure from the employee roster was the last nail in the coffin. Morticia turned to her daughter Wednesday, whose Goth appearance was even more severe than normal, and sighed, "Our employees are quitting as fast as we hire them, productivity has never been lower, and I am at my wit's end. Honey, if I cannot find a way to slow down our employee turnover, your father will have my head on a plate." Then Morticia's face took on a dreamy look, accented by a wistful smile. Wednesday interrupted her mother's reverie, "Mother, now's not the time to think about fun! We've got work to do."

Back at the Addams Construction headquarters, Wednesday purposely followed Morticia to her office, closed the door, and stood before her mother in stone-faced silence. "I suppose," Morticia finally began, "you have some thoughts regarding our revolving door workforce."

"Yes, mother. I do," Wednesday began. "While I had Pugsley on the rack last week, he told me about a management consultant who has helped Lurch. I called this guy later - his name is Mort - and he gave me some hiring tips. Mort called his approach *Hiring for Keeps*, and these are the highlights." Wednesday went on to outline the following seven steps to hiring for keeps.

**STEP 1:** Define the job in the clearest terms possible, and then reduce the key elements – skills, experience, responsibility areas, and personal characteristics – to a one-page job profile. Clarity is the key issue here. The job profile is also very helpful when networking to fill open positions.

For some positions, the requirements should include goals or accomplishments the candidate is expected to complete within six and 12-months following hire. It helps to identify these goals by asking, “Looking back a year from now, what accomplishments would clearly prove this was an excellent hiring decision?”

**STEP 2:** Describe the culture of the group in which the successful candidate would work *and* the core beliefs of the overall organization. Culture reflects the behavioral norms of a group, and defines what behaviors will be rewarded and which will be punished. These behaviors may include cooperation (a focus on teamwork or individual accomplishment), communication (rigid/formal or flexible/relaxed), decision making (top down or participative), and work values (family friendly or 80-hour work week expectations). Defining the culture also clarifies the personality traits (outgoing, an interest in helping others, willingness to collaborate, taking initiative, etc.) that are valued, along with those that are not. Administering standard personality assessments to successful existing employees can help define the desired traits for new hires.

Wednesday paused in her discourse to add, “The late Mr. Gatwell is an example of a poor hiring decision. Despite a solid education and creative talents, he was not a good fit for the vehicle fleet manager position. Lurch needed a detail-oriented person who could control costs, skills Gatwell lacked. Creativity is good in its place, but designing methane powered trucks using cows for the gas was tragically inappropriate.” Wednesday then continued.

**STEP 3:** Identify any non-negotiable items, whether skills, experience, or personal characteristics. Once set, these non-negotiable items should be respected. The point: Don’t panic and make hasty decisions you’ll later regret.

**STEP 4:** Establish the recruiting strategy. This includes the ways to identify, attract, evaluate, and hire job candidates. Use all practical recruiting channels, and consider places outside the mainstream. For example, networking with friends in churches or volunteer organizations can uncover a pool of candidates that your competitors for workforce talent may have overlooked.

**STEP 5:** Define the decision-making process for screening, interviewing, evaluating, and selecting candidates. Answer the question, “Who is responsible for what?” Involving several people in the hiring process usually improves results, and always builds more buy-in for the candidate eventually chosen. When using a team, ensure everyone involved agrees on the selection criteria and understands the decision making process.

**STEP 6:** Carry out at least two interviews with a candidate before making a hiring decision. The first interview should focus on comparing the candidate’s experience, skills, and talents with the job requirements. The second interview should concentrate on personality and cultural fit within the organization.

**STEP 7:** Before hiring, verify claimed skills and prior accomplishments. Also carry out background checks and test or otherwise confirm the candidate can meet basic writing and math requirements. Finally, contact

candidate can meet basic writing and math requirements. Finally, contact previous employers because sometimes candidates who “look good on paper” and interview well have a work history incompatible with the position for which they have applied.

Wednesday’s posture stiffened even more as she concluded, “Mother, I know how Dad is. He believes we should hire fast to get enough bodies and fire fast to get rid of the slackers.” Morticia sighed, thinking, *That’s my darling Gomez, a man of action!* “But we need to take the time to select the right person for the right job,” Wednesday continued, “because people are happier and perform better when they play to their strengths.”

*How times change*, thought Morticia. *Hearing my sadistic little Wednesday speaking of happy people! Things really have become serious!* “You are quite right.” replied Morticia. “Things must change if we’re to keep our sanity, not to mention our heads, so let’s call Mort to help us create a new hiring process.”

*Tom Wagner*

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