



Hiring In + TRANSITION

By **Michael Woodward**

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I recently met up with one of my executive clients for a quick cup of coffee at one of the several hundred Starbucks locations that have taken root in my little slice of the world. A large part of our conversation focused on the issue of business transition. Over the course of the last year his organization has been proactively transitioning from a small local start-up to a regional player. As part of this transition the organization was working towards doubling its retail presence locally and expanding into neighboring municipalities. Naturally, one of the first concerns to come to mind was the impending labor force expansion he was going to have to deal with.

His calm demeanor certainly didn't reflect the looming turbulence I could see on the horizon. So, I asked him if he had thought much about the coming hiring ramp-up that would be accompanying the aggressive expansion. He commented that hiring had never been a problem for the company. However, he readily admitted that the reason hiring had never been a real issue for the company was the fact that the executive team had strong local ties with the community and a great local reputation. I agreed that these were necessary attributes to start out with, but they were not going to be sufficient for moving to the next level. I explained to him that as an organization entering into an expansion phase, they would have to rely on more than just local ties. His organization was about to venture out past the confines of their backyard... and into the backyards of others. This new journey would require a very

different strategy and a whole new way of thinking. In other words, for them to maintain their momentum, they would have to change.

Institutionalization - Changing to Stay the Same

At first glance it may sound a bit oxymoronic, but in order to maintain the core of what your organization stands for, you have to change. When in the 'start-up' phase it's common for organizations to look to what they know in order to establish a foundation of talent. Leveraging local connections is a great way to build a team of individuals who share your values, vision and passion. However, this informal process is no longer a viable means for building and maintaining a workforce when your organization is expanding to the next level. The fact of the matter is that when you add more players, you must add more rules. The process of expansion entails growing beyond the comfort zone of the close knit 'start-up' crew.

Institutionalizing Culture

According to Edgar Schein, an organization's culture can be thought of as the values, philosophies and norms that dictate the way in which employees interact with each other and the world at large. As an organization grows, maintaining the core culture becomes more challenging. The leadership team no longer has direct access to the organization's members and therefore must rely on working through others to transmit culture. Leaders are no longer in the role of handpicking the day-to-day face of the organization. Thus, as HR practitioners, it is now

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up to you to bring in talent that is commensurate with the values of your leaders. Accomplishing this task requires institutionalization.

Quite frankly, as organizations grow, their hiring processes typically remain the same. Often this means that there is no real structure in place or documentation to provide guidance to those now tasked with doing the hiring. It is during this critical stage that you, as an HR practitioner, must work diligently to learn and understand the organization's critical cultural elements, so as to preserve that which is the essence of the organization through targeted hiring. A large part of this is providing hiring managers with the proper tools for making good hiring decisions that are consistent with the culture and vision set by your organization's leadership. It is basically your responsibility to bridge the gap between executive leaders and managers. Doing so will require the institutionalization of a defined hiring process.

Defining the Hiring Process

Look in the Mirror:

Because it's just in my nature (and the result of 10 years of training), I always have to begin with the psychological stuff. As I mentioned in the summer issue of *Go Jobing*, introspection is always a critical first step in any organizational process. It is up to you, as an HR practitioner, to take a hard look in the mirror and determine who you are as an organization and where you are going. A couple key questions include:

- What is the management philosophy of our leaders?

- What are the core values of the organization?
- Where are we going as an organization?
- Does the face of the organization's service staff, reflect what we are striving to be?

Once you have answered these questions you can begin considering what your hiring needs are. From a talent perspective, you must identify what your strengths and weaknesses are (or will be) and determine if you need to hire to your weaknesses. A thoughtful analysis of the key line positions will guide you in your search for new hires.

Outline the Process:

Unfortunately, legal and ethical hurdles prevent us from cloning our top employees, so our best alternative is to create a rigorous vetting process. A process that is designed to hone in on those critical qualities that lead to a successful person-organization fit. Key to the sustainability of this process is its institutionalization.

First and foremost, institutionalizing a process requires the identification of a process to be institutionalized. Basically, you need to create an outline of the hiring process and put it in writing. This begins with a sketch of what you believe the process should look like and who should be involved. In other words, you must draw a map. Here are a couple of steps to help with creating that map:

- Determine what you need to elicit from candidates

- a. Values
- b. Motivation
- c. Personality
- d. Intelligence
- e. Background/Experience

- Sketch out the hurdles/steps for getting this information
- Identify any relevant legal and policy issues/constraints
- Identify who should be involved and when
- Define the decision making criteria
- Map out the steps

Develop the Tools

Create clear and concise guides for hiring managers that illustrate how to conduct each step of the process. Basically, you must create guardrails designed to keep your hiring managers on track! Tools typically include:

- Process guides
- Phone screen sheets
- Formatted structured interview questions
- Rating guides and decision criteria

Garner Buy-in

As you develop your hiring tools, be sure to include stakeholders your subject matter experts and end users. Remember, as an HR practitioner, your expertise is in process, not content. Seeking out the knowledge and expertise of your hiring managers and line

professionals will provide you with invaluable information, while at the same time creating buy-in from your internal customers. When it comes to implementation, and ultimately institutionalization, their buy-in will be key to your success.

Communicate with Stakeholders

The last step in institutionalization is building awareness. In order to get everyone on board you must tell them where the gang plank is! This means communicating the process through both formal and informal channels. It also means providing the necessary tools to those who are expected to use them. If the appropriate stakeholders were involved early in the process, communication should be fairly smooth. Some avenues for getting the word out include:

- New manager training
- Webinars/podcasts
- Newsletters
- Regular meetings
- E-mail blasts

Once a process has been developed, vetted and documented it must be integrated into the fabric of the organization. By building awareness through communication and training you can effectively establish the hiring process as a norm in your culture. Once the process becomes a norm, it has been institutionalized. ♦

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