

What to look for in your next IT staff hire

Attrition. It's inevitable. This is especially true in an age where millennials are prone to quickly move on when a job doesn't fit their needs or sensitivities.

That doesn't mean this new generation of hires isn't worthy of seeking out. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Millennials are passionate and hard working ... when the job fits. Besides, chances are you're going to see more and more millennials in your hiring pool.

If you are looking to hire new IT staff members, you'll have to choose carefully from this new generation, as well as previous generations. And, as anyone that's ever had to undertake the task of hiring staff knows, this can be pretty challenging.

If you hire the wrong employee, your best case scenario sends you back to the hiring pool to find someone else. This is a fairly easy process, especially if you use an [IT staffing service](#). The worst-case scenario could set your department back in considerable ways while costing you a lot.

Clearly, you want to get this right. But how?

The most important thing you can do is to know exactly what you're looking for in a new employee. This isn't always so obvious. But with a bit of help, you can go into the hiring phase fully prepared to make the right selection.

Let's see what you should be looking for in your next IT staff hire.

Skills

Let's talk skills first. Why? If someone doesn't have at least a fundamental understanding of how IT works, you shouldn't consider them. Notice I said "fundamental". That's crucial. Unless you're hiring for a very specific task (say, Kubernetes developer), someone with a strong grasp on the basics of technology will go further than someone who knows the minutiae of IPv6.

Instead of hiring someone who is a master of IPv6, you'd probably do best to hire someone who has an essential understanding of all the networking topics (DNS, DHCP, TCP, UDP, subnets, NAT, etc.).

Think big picture. Consider someone who could wear more than one hat. Why? There's simply no way around it. When you work in IT, you never know what kind of task you'll end up handling. Printing, networking, antivirus, end-user issues, configuring desktops, deploying servers, cabling, replacing CMOS batteries - chances are you're going to have to do one or another at some point.

So a good place to start with an IT staff member is to think about a jack-of-all-trades.

Personality

A lot of people overlook this way too often. One thing you must remember is that IT isn't about living in the basement or server room of a building, never having come in contact with non-IT employees as some movies or TV shows might have you believe.

Your IT staff will be interacting with other employees on a daily basis. You don't want to get complaints about a member of your staff speaking to another employee inappropriately, or making them uncomfortable.

Another issue that tends to permeate IT is the superiority complex. Because most end users are clueless as to what IT staff does, it can lead to a feeling of superiority. That can easily translate to your IT staff treating other employees as though they are beneath them.

Because of this, it is crucial that you weed out possible staff members who might easily fall prey to that complex. You want to concentrate your hiring efforts on prospective employees that are cordial, respectful, prompt, well-spoken, polite, and considerate.

Remember, your IT staff might be walking into offices where fellow employees are frustrated or overly concerned about losing work or precious time. Your staff needs to be able to be reassuring and calming, not frenetic and snippy.

If given the opportunity to hire someone who has incredible skills but a questionable personality or someone with passable skills and an incredible personality, go with the personality every day. Why? Skills can be trained. Personality? Not so much.

Creativity

Sometimes the prescribed solution doesn't always work. Documentation isn't always right and Google doesn't always find the best answer. When that happens, you want an IT staffer who can think on their feet and be creative.

When the solution isn't obvious, that's when you really get to prove yourself. To do that, you have to color outside of the lines and find a new solution. And most times it doesn't matter which route you take, it only matters that you arrive.

End users don't care if Problem X is resolved with Solution Y or Solution Z—they only care that they can get their work done. So when you're interviewing prospective employees, hit them with questions that will require a modicum of creativity. Avoid those who see everything in black and white, because a lot of times the best solution is gray.

Think Fast

Along with creativity, it's important that your new hires can think quickly. Things the realm of IT can go wrong at any time — sometimes cataclysmically so. When that happens, your staff needs to act quickly. You need them to find solutions fast.

When a company email server goes down, employees lose an important form of communication. Your company can't work. Your team won't get the whole day to work on that server. You need it back up and running as quickly as possible!

Just remember that it's important that you find new IT hires that can think fast, but not in a panic. Look for new hires capable of coming with solutions quickly, but with measured calm. Give those new hires a complicated problem and an impossibly short time to solve the problem. Watch to see if they can get creative with their solutions or if they crack under the pressure.

Conclusion

Hiring a new IT staff member doesn't have to be a hair-pulling experience. If you follow these 4 suggestions, the chance of you hiring the right person grows exponentially. But remember, if you get it wrong on the first try, learn from your mistakes and you'll probably get it right the next time around.