

7 Good Questions Before You Hire for An Open Position

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This has been a crazy year, especially when it comes to leading and managing staff changes. Very few businesses have a staff that looks the same today as it did early in March of 2020. How are you feeling about your team?

Remember, every time you change just one of your staff members; you change your culture unless you place intentional effort into cultivating and sustaining the culture you want. Redesigning staff structure when you weren't planning on it has brought both positive and negative outcomes in many churches.

Re-deployment of staff members from one position to another is very common among businesses now, and re-deployment of a staff member has, in many cases, turned out to be a surprisingly positive and productive change. However, a more difficult but understandable reality is also in play; there have been lay-offs, voluntary resignations, and some salary reductions.

Few businesses are hiring in general, except for positions they absolutely must-have. The good that comes from the hiring pressures and complexities in 2020 is that business leaders have learned better how to play chess, not checkers, when it comes to staffing strategy. Think ahead as much as possible. Decision-making is not always easy, but it has become more focused.

If there is any "sloppy" in your hiring process, it has to be eliminated. There is no room for optional, fast, or casual hires. Staffing has become more intentional, and hiring for your team must be:

- Mission-critical
- Growth directed
- Clearly focused
- Quickly productive
- Option oriented

Here are 7 questions that will help you think through your hiring decisions before you actually start a search and interview process.

1) Are you hiring for productivity or relief?

Digging deeper in staffing conversations with other businesses, I've learned that while we all know that the best reason for hiring a new staff member is increased productivity, it is often for some relief. That's understandable. Some of your staff carry very heavy loads, and maybe you do too.

But hiring someone primarily because you or someone on your team is exhausted or needs help is not the right place to *start*. It's better to start solving that problem by reducing their list of responsibilities first. Get tough about what doesn't need to be done.

The staff member is more important than their tasks. You can always temporarily shorten their list some if they are overloaded.

Let me be really blunt. The parts of an existing job that are often assigned to the new position are the less productive and sometimes more annoying roles. Resist that at all costs. Tighten up the position responsibilities! When you hire, make it your goal to achieve greater *productivity* as well as the *health* of your staff.

2) Do you need vision and creativity or implementation and progress?

Most staff members need to possess some skill in both vision and creativity as well as implementation and making measurable progress. However, a team of mostly visionaries and ideators and too few who can or will execute is not a good mix for consistent progress. Knowing what your team needs most, ideas, or execution will help shape the design of the role you want to hire. You can ask this question about nearly any position on your team.

3) Do you need to drive growth or manage critical systems *and* processes?

Driving toward the vision to realize healthy growth and managing key systems and processes are both vital and necessary, but they are rarely a hiring priority at the same time. It's smart to put vision and progress first when hiring. However, if you do that long enough without hiring support staff to keep that growth from creating chaos (reactionary, last-minute leadership, etc.,) you can end up losing the ground you have gained.

In short, people will begin to leave your church because you can't keep up with the basics of everyday growth and ministry. Which do you need most right now?

4) Are you hiring for the present or banking on the future?

Typically, you bank on your vision (the future) when you hire, but COVID has made that difficult because you can't see around the corner as well as you once could. Therefore, strategy is shorter in duration, and that often affects how you hire.

You probably have some staff needs right now, but unsure if you will need the same roles six to nine months from now. This is a good example of chess, not checkers. Obviously, you don't want to hire someone and have to let them go in six months.

Consider one or two other key roles and responsibilities that are needed and similar in nature to the position you are working on. Then ask yourself if the potential staff member may be able to pivot to a new role if needed.

Yes, this practice is layered, nuanced, and subjective. But you are wise to at least consider this question each time you hire in this crazy season. Think versatility, adaptability, and resilience with new staff.

5) What level of risk are you willing to take?

No matter how much homework you do when you hire a new staff member, there is always an unknown element. There is always a measure of risk. It's especially important these days to close that risk gap as much as you can.

COVID has changed the level of margin most business leaders are willing to "gamble" on a risk. I'm not suggesting that before COVID, you could be carefree or even careless in your hiring approach, but you likely had a little more margin for a mistake.

If you can only hire one or two people, for example, maybe for an extended period of time, you have to get it right. Here's the point. Make your decision in full recognition of how much risk you can accept.

- Know what you need.
- Know what you want.
- Don't lower your standards just to complete the hire.

It's far better to endure the pressure of an unfilled staff position than to hire the wrong person.

6) Is this position the highest priority to hire right now?

Having a solid grasp on which staffing positions are the highest priorities is an issue of your hiring process, team alignment, and decision-making. Your strategy should be set and agreed upon, but the interpretation of how to accomplish it can be subjective.

If you gather your exec staff at the table, or senior pastor and the board, it is likely that no one in the room would give the exact same list of hiring priorities. That's not a sign of misalignment; in fact, that's a healthy difference of opinion that helps make better decisions. Misalignment on your team occurs when you leave the table, and you were not able or willing to agree on your hiring priorities.

One of the most healthy and productive conversations you can have amongst your leadership team about staffing starts with a question like this; *"If you need three staff members and you can only afford one, how do you make that decision?"*

7) What would happen if you did not rehire the position?

If you have a position open and unfilled for six to nine months or longer, there's a good possibility you don't need that position. That's not always the case, but it's worth asking the hard question. COVID makes it more difficult to answer, but that question is more objective than subjective.

Here are a few more questions to help you think it through.

- What measurable progress will be lost if you don't rehire that position?
- Will you be placing undue pressure on other staff members? (Keep in mind your option to thin out your ministry expectations.)
- What can your budget sustain?
- Could a volunteer do the work? Part of the work? Temporarily?