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“The Most Trusted Names in Private Club Executive Placement”

Tips & Tricks for Hiring Well

By Richard Kopplin

When I am asked to assist a private club in recruiting a general manager, head golf professional or golf course superintendent there are three important qualities I look for in a capable candidate.

The first is competence. How proficiently has the candidate performed in his/her previous positions? Many candidates will present an impressive looking resume and some will even have experience at “prestigious clubs.” You should focus, however, on what the candidate accomplished during their tenure at their previous clubs. I always probe to find specific areas where the candidate has improved the club operation or where there has been a measurable impact on the services provided to the club members.

Has there been a progressive career path with increasing responsibilities? A good measure of this is how many employees have reported to this person and whether that number has grown through the years. I want to know how many employees the candidate has “mentored” during his/her career. I will talk to the protégés and ask how the candidate has helped move their careers forward.

When reviewing a candidate’s competence always keep in mind the golden rule of hiring: “The best indicator of how well the candidate will do in the future is how well they have done in the past.” You cannot change employees. Employees can change themselves with the proper motivation, but they will do so very slowly. Pay careful attention to how they have worked in the past and you will, in all likelihood, see that work performance repeated at your club.

The second quality that I always look for in a candidate is integrity. A worthy applicant will have demonstrated ethical behavior in his/her professional career. All of the other critical values emanate from the candidate’s honesty. Having said that, how do you evaluate a candidate’s integrity?

Begin by checking the facts. The candidate has provided a resume and often some additional documents (i.e. references, examples of work performed, awards and recognition). Too often a club will take the statements on a candidate’s resume at face value and never check for accuracy. It has been estimated that 40% of resumes have some degree of fabrication. I have found that most hyperbole is in three areas: educational degrees, responsibilities at the club and length of time with any given employer.

During the interview process I suggest using “the broken record technique.” Interview any senior level candidate at least three times and ask the same questions to see if the answers are consistent. The old maxim, “you don’t need to remember what you say if you tell the truth,” is very appropriate when conducting multiple interviews. An honest candidate usually responds with a similar answer to the same question when asked repetitively.

Another technique to utilize in evaluating an employee's integrity is what I call a "congruency test." After a thorough interview including the usual questions, ask the candidate a series of sentence completion questions, all of which are linked to previous queries earlier in the interview. These spontaneous answers are usually very accurate in demonstrating the candidate's consistency and stability with regard to important values.

The third quality critical in hiring is compatibility. Will the candidate be a good fit for the club? How appropriate is his/her management style for the club's needs? This characteristic is often described as "an intuitive feeling" that the candidate is going to be a good match for the club. While compatibility may be more subjective than other key traits, there are some objective ways to view the candidate's potential fit.

During the interview process, carefully observe the candidate's communication skills. Are they adequate and appropriate to the position? Does the candidate wait for the question to be asked or does he/she begin their response prematurely? Are the answers directed to the question in a clear and concise manner? Can the candidate articulate his/her thoughts and remain focused on the topic?

Just as important is the body language conveyed. Crossed legs or arms seem to tell us that the candidate may have problems "embracing" the club philosophy or may indicate an aloofness that is false confidence. Does the candidate maintain appropriate eye contact with the members of the search committee when he/she responds to their questions?

What types of questions does the candidate ask the search committee? (And always encourage the candidates to ask any questions they might have at the end of the interview.) Any serious applicant, who is going to spend over a third of their waking hours with your club, should have some thoughtful queries as to the club philosophy, history, organization, job expectations and so forth.

Obviously, there are additional characteristics that will determine if the candidate will be a successful employee. The club search committee will typically define many of those traits in the position description prior to initiating the search. But the three key qualities in any candidate, under serious consideration, should be competence, integrity and compatibility. If you suspect any of those traits are lacking in your applicant, immediately move to the next candidate.