



How to Avoid  
**THE MOST COMMON**  
Hiring errors

CALIPER

## About Caliper

*Caliper helps companies achieve peak performance by advising them on hiring the right people, managing individuals most effectively and developing productive teams. The accuracy, objectivity and depth of our personal consulting approach enables us to provide solutions that work for over 25,000 companies.*

## HOW TO AVOID THE 6 MOST COMMON HIRING ERRORS

In a guest column in *The New York Times*, the principals of Caliper dispelled one of the most popular hiring myths: that experienced job candidates are likely to outperform those without a track record.

Having assessed the potential of more than two million applicants and employees for over 25,000 companies, we have uncovered several other classic hiring errors – all of which can be avoided.

We would like to share with you some of the experiences, information and insights we have gleaned from helping our clients sidestep the six most common hiring errors.

## Thinking Experience Always Counts



When it comes to hiring, often entirely too much emphasis is placed on the past. Experience is what commonly is sought in job candidates and experience is often viewed as the ultimate tie-breaker when making a final decision.

But the price tag for taking this road can be high. How often is twelve years of experience just one year of bad experience warmed over a dozen times? In the end, effective hiring has less to do with experience than with potential.

By way of a quick example, one of our clients, Mark Steinberg, managing director of Allmerica Financial, a diversified group of insurance and financial services companies, says he has hired experienced people “who have fallen flat on their faces,” but on the other end of the spectrum, has seen “former nurses and teachers become highly successful in the financial services industry.” And Thomas J. Byrnes, vice president of sales at Avis, says that when searching for salespeople, his company has had “the most success in hiring people with little or no sales experience.” With technological advances driving the restructuring and reshaping of markets and industries, as well as the nature of many jobs, it does not make sense to base staffing decisions solely – or even largely – on the myth of experience.

## Placing Too Much Emphasis On The Interview



How often, after hiring someone who does not work out, have you thought to yourself, "But they looked so good in the interview."?

In such cases, "interview stars" as we call them, often prevail. They make a very favorable first impression, but their performance fizzles after the interview.

While interviews can provide valuable input into the hiring process, when all is said and done, you can often be left with more questions than answers.

For an interview to be effective, you need a very clear sense of the key qualities and competencies you are seeking in the ideal candidate. Only then will you be ready to develop a list of probing questions that will help you determine the extent to which each applicant possesses these qualities.

For instance, if you are trying to determine if an individual is confident and assertive, ask them to tell you about someone who influences them. Ask them to tell you about a time when they had to go against the rules. Ask them about the best suggestion they ever made. Then listen. As their stories unfold, you will learn much more about them – rather than simply allowing their résumé to serve as a roadmap for the interview, as so often happens.

Depending upon the particular job, you will want to ask similar questions to help assess a candidate's level of independence, initiative, empathy, persuasive ability, caution, energy, leadership, problem-solving skills, organizational ability, communication skills, capacity to follow directions, and service orientation.

These questions can be windows into someone's personality. Coupled with the findings from a valid personality assessment, they can provide you with an accurate read on whether the candidate's motivations are aligned with the needs of a specific job – before you bring them on board.

## Hiring In Your Own Image

**3** ERROR It is only natural to want to work with people you like. Human nature being what it is, everyone tends to like people who are most like themselves. This sets up a reflex action to hire people who remind us of ourselves, or, at least, with whom we have much in common. After all, who wants to surround themselves with people who get on their nerves?

But if you hire an entire staff of people just like yourself, you are bound to create an imbalanced organization. A staff with a preponderance of your strengths and virtues will also share your limitations. It would be like a football team made up of eleven quarterbacks with nobody to block or catch a pass.

To avoid hiring in your own image it is best to first outline very clearly the tasks you need the individual to accomplish, as well as the competencies and personality qualities that would enable an ideal candidate to get the job done. You will then be in a position to assess your most promising candidates against this ideal profile. This is the surest way to avoid hiring someone because you like them, then wondering a few months later why they didn't work out.

## Being Overly Impressed By Formal Education

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**E R R O R**

While education is clearly important and worth pursuing, having a diploma does not necessarily tell you whether an applicant is bright, empathic and flexible enough to learn and grow with your company.

The ability to learn and grow requires considerably more than a keen intellect. We have assessed many people with well above average intelligence who lacked the capacity to grow because they used their intelligence to rigidly defend their pre-conceived notions, rather than to genuinely seek new solutions or approaches.

On the other hand, many individuals with only average intelligence have the potential for growth because their openness, flexibility and empathy permit them to make full use of their capabilities.

The bottom line is not necessarily how someone does in a classroom. It has more to do with whether an individual is open and flexible, can shift gears under differing conditions and demands, can read between the lines and adjust accordingly, and is motivated to learn and grow.

## Depending Upon Training To Fill In The Missing Pieces

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One of the major problems with training (as most trainers will readily agree) is that it is generally assumed that everyone possesses the potential and talent to take advantage of what is being offered.

Appropriate training can certainly increase the productivity of someone who has inherent potential; however, an individual entirely devoid of potential for a particular position rarely improves with training, no matter how thorough it is.

For training to be profitable, individuals first need to be selected according to their innate potential and abilities. This takes an understanding and appreciation of what can be taught and what has to be brought. For instance, listening skills can be improved, but you cannot help someone to enjoy the persuasive process. Likewise, you can show someone how to manage their time more efficiently, but you cannot teach them to enjoy pleasing others. Certain skills can be taught, but you cannot give someone motivation or potential.

We have found that the only way an individual will take full advantage of a training opportunity is if it appeals to an inner ability.

Effective training begins with a thorough understanding of each individual's strengths, limitations and potential.



## Pirating From Your Competitors



The notion persists in many industries that pirating an employee from a competitor provides an enormous head start. The reasoning is that a pirated individual will be able to hit the ground running, because training can be skipped. An added benefit may even be that new clients will come along with this pirated individual.

But ask yourself, “Why would a successful person be willing to give up seniority and other benefits to come to me?” Is your opportunity really that much better than your competitor’s? If the answer is not a ringing “yes,” then seriously question the wisdom of “operation pirating.”

All too often the result of pirating from a competitor is nothing more than the recirculation of mediocrity. We have found that it is much easier to teach an inexperienced individual (who has real ability) how to do the job than to try to cash in on mediocre experience by retreading someone else’s employees. Though there are exceptions, in most cases the only time you should hire from a competitor is when you want to do them an enormous favor.

To help you avoid the most common hiring errors, Caliper's products and services include:

**The Caliper Profile** is a comprehensive personality assessment, which enables our consultants to tell you whether an individual has the qualities needed to make it in management, supervisory, sales and similar high-level positions within your company.

**The Individual Development Guide** is a special report derived from the results of the Caliper Profile, which helps you have focused, in-depth conversations with employees about what they have to do to grow—personally and professionally—with your company.

**Caliper Three Sixty** - This online feedback service combines an individual's self-image with feedback from peers, staff and supervisors, as well as the Caliper Profile.

**Performance Management** - To reach anticipated targets, you must be able to tie the performance and motivation of individuals to your overall strategic objectives.

**Caliper's Hiring Workshop** illustrates the key practices found in our hiring manual through an in-depth, participative, hands-on session, which will greatly enhance your ability to make the very best hiring decisions.

**Caliper can also partner with you for:**

- Executive Coaching
- High-Potential Employee Development Programs
- Team Building
- Action Learning
- Organizational Development
- Succession Planning

If you would like to discuss **"The 6 Most Common Hiring Errors"** or any other concerns you might have about hiring productive people, improving the productivity of individuals already on board, or developing a more effective team, please give us a call.

Whatever the challenge, our assessment and consulting approach provides you with the insights, information and clarity you need to make the most effective decisions.

We are here to help take your organization to a higher level of performance.

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