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A Manager's Toolkit for Hiring the Right Writer— Or How to Avoid Throwing a Wrench into the Works

Emily A. Sopensky and Laurie Modrey

Economic concerns require hiring writers (contract, freelance, and permanent) quickly and surely. Employers can make better use of the résumé and interview processes to hire the right writer. In this workshop, managers will analyze résumés and participate in a mock-interview process. Further, they will learn how to assess job candidates using four screening tools developed by the presenters in a three-step process designed to provide a means of consistently making the most appropriate selections for job openings.

STEP 1. DEFINITION

Defining the technical communicator's responsibilities is the first step in selecting a candidate. As with any project, defining the scope comes before soliciting resumes or setting up interviews. Having a clear understanding of what you want a communicator to do helps the hiring process as well as the working relationship.

Execute the following steps to ensure you are focused in defining the candidate of your choice:

1. Examine your reasons for hiring a communicator.
2. Determine the end-product(s) and time frame.
3. Determine the level of expertise required.
4. Determine the type of position.
5. Determine the support to be provided to the individual.

STEP 2. THE RÉSUMÉ

The résumé is your introduction to potential candidates. Besides serving as a record of past experience, the résumé should show evidence that the candidate can communicate efficiently and understands principles of document design. Examine the following four areas to assess the applicant's expertise:

- Format
- Job Titles
- Content
- Technical/Tool Skills

STEP 3. THE INTERVIEW

Once you've collected résumés of those you want to talk with, narrow the file by using the telephone to screen out those who are not available or not interested in your project. It is possible, but not always probable, that you can elicit salary or rate requirements.

Time is valuable to both you and the candidates. Both the telephone and in-person interviews should be short and to the point. To accomplish this,

1. Determine who will be involved in the interview.
2. Determine the role of each interviewer if more than one is participating.
3. Establish a checklist of questions to be asked.
4. Coordinate schedules.
5. During the interview, allow less time rather than more.
6. Compare notes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when hiring a technical communicator, first determine your needs. Then, consider the applicant's:

- Writing, speaking, and human interaction skills.
- Knowledge of the entire documentation process.
- Understanding of the basic technical concepts in your industry.

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