Finding – and Keeping – Top Talent
By Beverly Flaxington
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Beverly Flaxington is a practice management consultant. She answers questions from advisors facing human resource issues. To submit yours, email us here.

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Dear Bev,

We just hired the fourth person to fill a junior role. We go through an extensive interview process where I have all six members of our advisory firm interview the candidate; we check references and we do what you might call “behavioral interviewing.” This employee just gave us notice after eight weeks! It is expensive, frustrating and moreover, we lose inertia every time we have to stop and train someone new. One of my senior advisors is convinced it is the newer generation; they just don’t care. I don’t believe that’s true. Are we doing something wrong or is there really a dearth of good talent?

Patrick S., Midwest

Dear Patrick:

There are many pieces to answer your inquiry – but let me start with the short answer, “yes and yes.”

In some areas of the country there is a shortage of good talent (but it is not because the entire younger generation doesn’t care) and there are other things you could be doing to increase your chances of making a good hire.

Your note didn’t say exactly where you were located, or what this job was other than “largely junior.” My firm developed an approach we call “360-degree hiring,” so let me give you some of our best thinking on how you, or any advisor, can increase the chances of making a better match for a role.:}
1. Make sure you know exactly what the role is. Too many times an advisory firm will know they need someone and might want a “Jack or Jill of all trades” and the job expectations become difficult to articulate or measure. Be clear about successful outcomes and what you need from this role.

2. Look for candidates in non-standard places. Don’t just post an ad in the local paper. Consider finding someone through the graduate program at local colleges and universities, post to places like ZipRecruiter.com that scan a number of job boards, offer a reward to employees for referring a new staff member and post to your local FPA or CFA chapter. Be sure you are in enough places for good candidates to find you.

3. Have a clear hiring process. Don’t just have everyone in the firm interview just to interview. Give everyone specific questions to ask, have them meet together once they have all been through the process and compare notes. Don’t leave it up to, “Do you like the person or not?” Give clear guidelines to your team about what role you need each of them to play, and how much weight you will give to their input.

4. The behavioral interviewing you are doing is very good so keep going with that but be sure you are asking non-standard questions. “What kind of culture is a best fit for you?” “What kind of culture would you struggle to work within?” “Tell me about the best boss you ever had and why he/she was best? Conversely tell me about the worst boss you ever had and why?” “Describe a day in your life if you got to choose what you wanted to do and enjoyed most every minute of it, what would you be doing. Relate that to your work and career – why this job, or this field?”

5. Align compensation with business goals. Be sure you are rewarding the behavior you need and expect and that you are competitive with others in your area offering similar roles.

6. Give feedback. Sit down with the person at the end of the first week, then the first month, etc. Do this at least monthly throughout the first year. What’s working, what’s not – what are they learning, what else do they want to learn? Keep the dialogue open and talk often. Be sure you are communicating very specifically so the person knows what they need to do to improve.

7. Lastly, refrain from an attitude that says a certain group of people is less adequate. I teach college courses on leadership and I find some students don’t really care, but the vast majority is attentive, involved and excited to learn. There are many people in their early 20s into early 30s who work hard, want to be part of something and get enthused. You have to make sure your workplace allows them to do so.

I hope you can find something in this list to try next time. There is an excellent book called “Topgrading” by Dr. Bradford Smart I often recommend. It talks about the cost to business of making a poor hiring decision. You have already seen this firsthand but you may find some good tips in his book. Best of luck!
Dear Bev,

Please give me your one best tip for managing stress in a small, overwhelmed advisory practice?

Beth G, California

Dear Beth:

Learn the art of deep breathing! Take three deep breaths in, through your nose and blow them out through your mouth. Focus on filling your stomach, not your chest, with your breath. As you breathe say to yourself, “I am calm. I am confident. I am in control”. Keep doing this several times throughout the day. You cannot breathe deeply and be stressed out at the same time!

Beverly Flaxington co-founded The Collaborative, a consulting firm devoted to business building for the financial services industry in 1995; in 2008 she co-founded Advisors Trusted Advisor to offer dedicated practice management resources to advisors, planners and wealth managers. She is currently an adjunct professor at Suffolk University teaching undergraduate students Leadership & Social Responsibility. Beverly is a Certified Professional Behavioral Analyst (CPBA) and Certified Professional Values Analyst (CPVA).

She has spent over 25 years in the investment industry and has been featured in Selling Power Magazine and quoted in hundreds of media outlets, including the Wall Street Journal, MSNBC.com, Investment News and Solutions Magazine for the FPA. She speaks frequently at investment industry conferences and is a speaker for the CFA Institute.

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