

## Avoiding the Pitfalls of a “Bad Hire”

In working with small businesses and entrepreneurs, I have never heard a business owner say they that they regret having to fire an employee. Too often, business owners keep unwanted staff too long or for the wrong reasons, and even more often, they make the wrong hiring choice in the first place. Interviewing potential employees is tricky, and there are very few managers who have been trained in effective interview techniques.

To avoid bad hires, you need to avoid some common traps that hiring managers tend to fall into (with thanks to [Dave Logan](#) for [sharing his insights](#) on BNET and to Ben Horowitz for his original blog post that started the thread):

- **Don't hire because “I like the look of this guy.”** Remember the old adage, you can't judge a book by its cover? The same is true of an empty suit. A lot of executives are hired based on appeal or charisma, especially if you haven't thought hard enough about the job criteria.
- **Don't start looking for an archetype.** You have an idea in your head about what it takes to be the perfect bookkeeper, marketing manager, sales director, whatever, so you try to cast the job like you would cast a movie. Bad idea. You need the right person for your company right now. You have specific requirements that need to be addressed today, so look for someone who can solve your problem. Also question your idealization. What's it based on? Can you describe your perfect candidate in terms that make sense in an interview or for another hiring manager? Best to screen the candidates for their capabilities, without preconceptions.
- **Hire for strengths, not lack of weakness.** Nobody is perfect, and too often hiring managers look at candidates using a checklist that results in a hire for lack of weakness; whoever hits the most check boxes and looks less awful than the other candidates wins. Instead, look for strengths that match your criteria, and look for someone strong in those areas where you need strength.
- **Never hire for untapped potential.** People never fully develop their potential and hiring based on what might be is, as Logan says, “like buying land in Nevada and waiting for California to fall into the ocean. It'll probably happen, but not in time to help you now.”
- **Hire smart people.** You can't teach IQ, so make sure they have the brains for the job. And here's one of my own...
- **Hire ethical people.** Just like you can't teach smarts, you also can't teach someone to be a hard worker or honest if it's not in their nature.

It's also important to closely define your hiring criteria so you understand what you really need, and [build out a process](#) that helps match the skills to the criteria. But that's a topic for another blog post.