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RECRUITMENT

HIRING HEADACHES

It pays to take care to find the best talent and to avoid hiring applicants who stack their resumes with non-existent experience. **Report: Leo D'Angelo Fisher**

● There may well be a skills shortage, technology entrepreneur Andrew Gorecki ruefully observes but there is no shortage of candidates claiming skills they do not possess.

The founder and managing director of Melbourne-based specialist software company Retail Directions became so fed up with “substandard candidates” with a penchant for stacking their resumes with non-existent or exaggerated experience that he decided to look overseas for sorely needed software professionals.

“When we advertise locally for people there is always a large number of applications but the applicants are usually not up to standard,” he says.

“When you talk to them, it’s clear they have overstated their experience and they can’t demonstrate the expertise they claim on their CVs.”

Gorecki says rigorous testing of claimed expertise – such as in specific programming languages – exposes most

In the UK, people stick with their employers and staff are not going to jump ship for a 5 per cent pay increase

Caught out: A little bit of care can expose the fakers and exaggerators

of the pretenders but some make it through and it makes him angry.

“It costs me money that I would rather be spending on productive work not on carrying people who are not up to the job,” he says.

Gorecki started Retail Directions in 1993, specialising in retail management software. The company has been exporting its technology since 2000 when Britain’s The Body Shop International, now part of the L’Oréal Group, began using its systems. Retail Directions software is now used in 20 countries. “We need to apply world standard skills in our business and that’s what we’re struggling to find in Australia,” Gorecki fumes.

Looking overseas for talent is not unusual; what is out of the ordinary is that Gorecki doesn’t sponsor skilled migrants to Australia, or send programming work to low-cost countries such as India or China. Instead, having set up a representative office in the regional city of Leicester in England in 2010, last year Gorecki hired his first British employees.

Retail Directions has a staff of 65, four of them in Britain, and two more starting shortly. Hiring programmers in Britain ensures a continuity of language, education and culture, Gorecki says, so they are able to work in tandem with colleagues in Melbourne.

Gorecki says technology and telecommunications connectivity lets British staff work seamlessly with head office – and it costs him 25 per cent less than it would to hire comparable staff in Australia. “The market is not as expensive there,” he says. “You don’t have mining companies offering prospective employees premium salaries that inflate expectations across the whole industry.”

Although initially intended as remote staff for the Melbourne head office, Gorecki says it makes sense to use the Leicester office to pursue new business

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opportunities and he has hired a business development manager to bang the Retail Directions drum in Britain.

Another plus of recruiting in Britain is that he does not encounter “job hoppers”, who he says have become endemic in information technology as IT professionals exploit the skill shortage to continually change employers in search of higher salaries and more senior positions. He suspects this may explain the trend to exaggerated CV claims.

“I will not consider a person [in Australia] who has not been in the same job for two years,” he says. “If someone has had six jobs in nine years, that tells me he is likely to do the same with me if I give that person a job.

“In the UK, particularly in the smaller cities, people stick with their employers. They want good employers that offer long-term prospects and job satisfaction; they’re not going to jump for a 5 per cent increase in salary.”

Gorecki says he does not have the same problem with bogus career claims in Britain. “It’s more of an Australian thing,” he says.

A director of Sydney recruitment firm Aequalis Consulting, Simon Boulton, says there will always be a risk of exaggeration in CVs and the onus is on employers to do their due diligence.

“Where there are very technical requirements that are essential they need to be examined with a test or case study or in a criteria-based interview, preferably done with the subject matter expert from the organisation,” he says.

Boulton says lax or inconsistent

internal recruitment processes, or unduly complex ones, can make it easier for dishonest candidates to successfully navigate their way through interviews. Poorly constructed processes can result in the wrong people interviewing candidates, leaving false or exaggerated career claims going untested.

“Good hiring needs a well trained eye over CVs, a detailed interview with at least two people in the organisation who can ask the right questions, even if they are not the people who will be making the final hiring decision,” he says.

“If it’s an IT appointment, for example, someone from the human resources department may know that the candidate requires experience in SQL programming but they’re not going to be skilled enough to ask the right questions. They should bring in someone from the IT department to take part in the interview.”

Boulton says smaller organisations that lack internal experts should consider using external stakeholders. He gives the example of a growing company that did not have the in-house expertise to conduct the selection process in hiring its first financial controller, so its chief executive asked the partner of an external accounting firm to assess the leading candidates’ technical abilities.

Boulton says online programs are available to test candidates’ expertise in various sectors and disciplines. He also recommends scenario testing – setting candidates problems to which they must respond with a solution.

Many employers favour multiple

interviews with leading candidates – often three to five and sometimes more – to make sure candidates pass muster.

“Exaggeration can be identified pretty easily with the right questioning. A superb interviewer will be able to get to the bottom of everything,” he says.

However, Boulton also has a word of caution. “If people are setting out to deceive, then there will always be a way to pull the wool over people’s eyes, so the more structured and thorough the selection process, the better.” BWW

- 01** Have a structured, thorough and consistent selection process.
- 02** Word recruitment advertisements carefully and exactly to attract the right applicants.
- 03** Include at least two people from the employer organisation in interviews.
- 04** Include subject-matter experts who can ask the right questions in interviews with candidates involving technical or specialist skills.
- 05** Train hiring managers how to interview candidates.
- 06** Consider asking a valued supplier or external adviser to be involved in the interview process.
- 07** One interview is never enough. Three to five interviews is not unusual; sometimes more.
- 08** Always check referees on a CV and verify academic qualifications (yes, people fib about them).
- 09** Social media provides an additional insight into candidates’ careers but it is just one aspect of a thorough selection process.