



Overqualified Candidates: To Hire or Not? *7 Key Points to Consider*

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Windmill International***

As the economy struggles to stabilize and unemployment remains high, recruiters and human resource managers have continued to see a trend in the hiring process: more applications from overqualified candidates.

While a job requisition may require five years of experience, recruiters are receiving plenty of applications from candidates with twice as much work history – *or more*. Similarly, applicants with advanced degrees are applying for jobs that only call for a bachelor’s degree.

Many in human resources are leery of hiring an overqualified candidate for fear the employee will be difficult to manage or leave as soon as a more attractive position comes along. And some hiring managers are reluctant to hire someone who has more skills and might outshine them in the workplace.

Don’t Disqualify Experience

Recruiters and HR managers who *do* hire overqualified candidates urge their peers not to overlook these skilled professionals, citing these benefits of having an overqualified candidate on the team:

- 1. More Flexibility** – “Do we hire overqualified candidates? Yes!” exerts Len Costa, director of talent acquisition at Windmill International. The firm hires security-cleared candidates for government agency contracts with organizations including the Air Force, Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and NATO. “The term ‘overqualified’ is hugely misleading. If a person has skills that are applicable to other areas of our company, we can use those skills not only for the job they were hired to do, but also in the company at large. That makes the person flexible to us.” Costa says, “When you hire the best and the brightest, by definition they have the skills and abilities that exceed the stated qualifications for the position. So, naturally we have quite a few member-owners who exceed the position description requirements.”

He notes that utilizing an overqualified candidate’s broader skill set doesn’t just benefit the company. “It also engages the candidate and tells that person that we value them *and* their experience.”

2. **Extra Motivation** – When overqualified candidates join a team, they often inject a new energy into a group by sharing their skills and inspiring an existing team to “up their game.” They can also bridge the gap between employees and management says Cotton Phillips, service director for MurTech Consulting, LLC, which provides staffing services to Fortune 1000 companies and IT service companies. “The individual can provide balance between junior- and senior-level skill sets and the expertise can come from the team, not management. I think there’s a tremendous value there,” explains Phillips.
3. **More Value** – When it comes to overqualified candidates, Costa says you often get more than you pay for. “When you’re hiring an overqualified candidate you shouldn’t overpay, but you may have to stretch and pay at the high end of the candidate’s range,” he says. “In return, you’re likely to get more bang for your buck because the candidate can inspire other team members, and has the additional skills and knowledge to move up quickly and help the organization grow.”



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Onboarding – Make Extra Preparations

Even with all the potential benefits of hiring an overqualified candidate, recruiters advise careful consideration during the hiring process and extra preparation when you onboard them. To ensure you make the best hire – whether the candidate is overqualified or not – take these factors into consideration:

- A. **Conduct an Honest Interview** – During the interview, ask the candidates *directly* about how they’ll handle their overqualification for the job. “With overqualified candidates it’s important to put all the cards on the table,” says Phillips. “Early on we acknowledge to the candidate that they’re overqualified. I also ask them to convince me as to why they want the job and I try to gauge whether they want the position for the right reasons.”
- B. **Do a Personality Check** – The fundamental rule of liking the person you hire still applies, even more so for overqualified candidates who already have the skills and education required. Ask yourself: Would you want to ride the elevator with this person each morning or share an office with him or her? “Someone’s resume can speak to many different aspects of the job, but what it really comes down to is the individual and how they approach their work,” says Phillips. “The person’s attitude and demeanor and how well they’ll fit into the work environment are still very important.”
- C. **Set Clear Expectations** – Some hiring managers may perceive overqualified candidates as threats, people who will try to use their additional knowledge and skills to change processes or take control, while other team members may resent the new employee’s extra experience. Management and Human Resources can alleviate some of those concerns early in the onboarding process by clarifying where and how the overqualified candidate fits into the organization and by being specific about what his or her job parameters are.

D. Plan Ahead – Look around your organization for other opportunities to maximize an overqualified candidate’s skill set – then use them. “You would be amazed at the people who are multifaceted and have so many skills in an organization, but they go untapped. We do everything we can to tap those skills,” comments Costa. The more successful you are at challenging an overqualified employee, the better the chances your new employee will feel invested in your company and remain a strong contributor — even as the economy improves and other opportunities arise.

Takeaways

The next time a resume from an overqualified candidate comes across your desk, don’t discard it. Remember: by conducting a thorough, honest interview and adding a few extra steps to your onboarding process, hiring an overqualified candidate can be one of your most strategic hiring decisions.

