

Nine Deadly Sins Contractors Commit When Hiring Managers

By Monroe Porter

Many contractors are not good at hiring and managing managers. Managing managers requires different process and skill sets from managing field employees. Manager success is based on skills and a scope of work that goes beyond day to day job functions. While it is impossible to learn how to become a better manager of managers just by reading a magazine article, possibly this information can help you avoid some of the common mistakes contractors make.

1. **The Wrong Mindset:** Mistakenly thinking you are hiring a person who will think and act like you. Understand you are not hiring yourself. You are hiring an employee who will work for and with you to run the company. If this employee thought and acted like an owner, he or she would be your competitor, not your employee.
2. **Lack of systems:** If this is the first management employee you have ever hired, understand that you may have to develop additional systems and procedures for them to succeed. If much of the business's operating systems are in your head, it is going to be very difficult for this employee to read your mind. Also understand that an additional manager will require additional administrative support. If not, you may be creating an overpaid clerk.
3. **Unrealistic expectations:** It is ok to fail. Hiring middle managers is like hiring field workers. The first field employee you hired probably is not still employed with you and others have come and gone. Hiring, firing and managing field employees are skills you learned through trial and error. This too will be a learning experience but with some forethought, you can increase the odds of your success.
4. **Vague on What You Want:** Failure to clearly define and think about the kind of person you are looking for can lead to a disaster. Many contractors reach out for someone to help reduce their stress. Early on you must decide if you want an assistant to help you or are you looking for a successor who may be able to assume upper management duties. If all you want is a flunky, you need to hire one. Hiring a top notch person and trying to make them into a long term errand boy will not work. We see this happen with owner's sons and daughters. If your son or daughter went to college, has a business degree, having them work in the field 5 years before moving into the office is probably unrealistic.
5. **Poor Hiring Process:** Not going through a formal hiring and search procedure can also lead to a disaster. Hiring someone you know who left their corporate job, you met at church, or knew from a supply house increases the odds that you will fail. Write a job description and advertise the position. If you know someone who would like to apply, have them apply with everyone else. Consider having a professional personality test done on potential candidates and run a background check on the individual. Be patient and go through a hiring process. This also applies to promoting a person from the field. If you are drowning, don't grasp for straws but rather find a life boat or more permanent solution.
6. **Inappropriate conversations:** Don't have inappropriate conversations with your new middle managers. You may be lonely and have run the business alone for years and there is a great temptation to bond with your new manager. Don't bitch about other employees or allude to promises that one day they may own the company. Premature promises will create false expectations and a culture of entitlement. Of course you want to be friendly and working with you should be a pleasant experience but keep conversations regarding the company and work performance focused.
7. **Unclear job descriptions:** You must write a clear job description and set clear expectations for your new employee. Since you may not have done this before, don't get too caught up in having the perfect job description. If you are replacing a person and filling an existing role, you will have a clearer understanding of what you want. However if this is a new position, it will evolve over time. Focus on what duties you want the person to perform and skills to master. Create a time line and format for communication.

8. **No career path:** Develop a career path for your new manager and work with them to create department or management goals. What do they know now? What do you want them to accomplish in the next 30 days, six months, one year? Realize that development of this path will be a moving target. Create specific dates for such reviews. Measure success and reevaluate. Creating such a measurement system can be difficult because your company is operational and jobs driven. The purpose of this time line is to force discipline and ongoing evaluation. You must also develop specific measurements of success. Just like job costs and schedules should be used to determine field success, middle managers need targets and goals to determine how they are performing. You also must create an on-going program to communicate with this manager as he or she develops.
9. **Unwillingness to change:** Last but not least, you must be willing to give up control and be willing to change. Your new manager is not going to do things exactly the way you are going to. However, you can only do so much and you hired this person to help you. If you are not willing to change, don't bother hiring a real manager. Instead, up your prices and shrink a little and determine how someone like a personal assistant might help you.

In summary, you will note that hiring a manager is not just about hiring a body to help. In fact, in the beginning it actually may require more time and effort. However, by taking the time to do it right, you will create a management team that will ultimately increase profitability while reducing personal stress.

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