



# How to Avoid a Bad Hire

Why new hires don't work out and what to do about it

» BY CRAIG DOWDEN, PhD

**E**very organization wants to have the best talent. Identifying, attracting and ultimately hiring high-potentials is a crucial element of the ongoing battle in the “war for talent”. It also holds considerable risks as bringing the wrong person onboard can incur significant costs, can slow down team performance and can negatively impact a healthy work environment. It is not surprising that HR executives and senior leaders are constantly searching for ways to mitigate these risks.

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An important and revealing study by Leadership IQ, a leadership training and research firm, exposed some important lessons that leaders and organizations can glean when approaching the critical initiative of recruiting. Their insightful research spanned three-years, from 2012 to 2014, and tracked 5,000 leaders who collectively hired more than 20,000 employees during the study period.

When they examined how organizations typically selected their new recruits, the vast majority use the same approach – they spend time interviewing and qualifying skill-based attributes. Essentially, more focus was placed on the technical side of the hiring equation in terms of what skills the candidates possessed, as well as their degree of competence in each of these areas.

Surprisingly, when the research team looked deeper and examined the survival rate of these recruits, 46% of these individuals failed to meet expectations within 18 months of starting the job. This failure rate is alarming, especially when considering the reason why these individuals were unsuccessful. Only 11% of those who failed were individuals deemed inadequate in terms of their technical abilities or skill sets. The vast majority (89%) did not make the grade due to their attitude or level of cultural fit.

Further exploration revealed the rationale underlying the lack of fit within the organization. Candidate failure is a result of four primary reasons:

**1 Lack of coachability (26%):** This was the most powerful predictor. Essentially, individuals did not accept and implement any of the feedback that they received from inside or outside the organization.

**2 Low levels of emotional intelligence (23%):** These hires lacked the ability to understand their

own emotions and possessed little, if any, insight into the emotions of the people around them.

**3 Lack of motivation (17%):** These individuals were not sufficiently inspired to achieve their full potential or excel in their role.

**4 Poor temperament (15%):** Those who were not successful demonstrated attitudes that did not fit with those of the organization, or their personalities created problems in terms of integrating into their new teams.

### How to avoid a bad hire

The above data do not paint an attractive portrait of the hiring processes of most organizations. Indeed, the majority seem to be spending too much time looking at the wrong qualities within their potential candidates. Now that we know the problem, the next question becomes, “what is the answer?”

With limited time and resources to get to really know someone quickly, a likely approach would be to incorporate a personality assessment into the process. One powerful tool that can be leveraged is “The Attentional Interpersonal Style Inventory (TAIS)” developed by Dr. Robert Neideffers, one of the world’s top 10 psychologists. TAIS is supported by over 40 years of research and is the assessment method of choice for the U.S. Navy Seals, numerous professional sports organizations, including the National Hockey League, the American Hockey League, and the National Basketball Association and it is also commonly used around the world in corporate contexts as the results prove invaluable in hiring, onboarding and developing talent.

A key advantage of TAIS is that it provides insight into the four key challenge areas causing candidate derailment outlined above. This means that the

recruiting team and HR leaders can be more confident when assessing the degree of fit for possible candidates.

If you are currently using a different tool, use caution as many on the market do not have adequate scientific rigour behind them. At a minimum, make sure your inventories exhibit adequate reliability (e.g., the stability of the results over time) and validity (e.g., scores on the instrument predict important outcomes of interest, such as on-the-job performance). If you are not sure about this, ask your consultant or assessment provider about the reliability and validity of the tool he or she is using. Otherwise, although the tool may appear to be high quality, the results may be anything but.

Despite the degree of emphasis we place on assessing technical competence, research suggests that intangibles, such as coachability and emotional intelligence, lead the way when it comes to determining the future success of new hires. Making sure we pay more attention to these areas is essential in finding the best fit candidate for our organizations. Most importantly, strengthening the robustness of our decision-making process by incorporating a rigorous assessment methodology, like TAIS, allows us to position ourselves and our organizations for success, both now and into the future. 

## Takeaways

Remarkably, 46% of new hires fail to meet expectations within 18 months, based on research by Leadership IQ.

### This failure is due to:

1. Lack of coachability
2. Low levels of emotional intelligence
3. Lack of motivation
4. Poor temperament

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*Craig Dowden, PhD, focuses on bridging the gap between what science knows and what business does. His firm specializes in the custom design and delivery of evidence-based leadership development programs and services. His main areas of practice include executive and career coaching, workshop facilitation/keynote speaking, employee engagement, and psychometric/personality assessment including 360-feedback.*