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Realistic Job Previews:
What You See Is What
You Get

Think back to the last time you went for a job interview. Once the interviewer got past asking you questions, how did he or she describe the job and organization? Most managers, when conducting employment interviews, almost exclusively focus on promoting positive aspects. They talk about interesting work assignments, the camaraderie among coworkers, opportunities for advancement, great benefits, and the like. Even though managers typically know the downside of the job and the organization, they carefully avoid those topics. Why turn off a good job applicant by talking about negatives?

Managers who focus only on the positives are making a mistake. As attested to by a survey of 2,300 recently hired employees, their main complaint was an unrealistic, inaccurate picture of their new job. They said, for instance, that they wished they had known the turnover rate for their position, true travel requirements, actual hours, and the actual state of the organization's finances; seen an official job description; and had more information about team structure and dynamics.

At its worst, managers who focus only on the positive are setting themselves up for the disappointment of a sudden and surprising resignation. All those hours spent reviewing candidate applications and conducting interviews prove wasted when, after only a few weeks or a month into the job, the new employee abruptly quits.

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Is there anything an astute manager can do to avoid this experience? The answer is Yes: Use realistic job previews (RJPs).

RJPs provide job applicants with both unfavorable and favorable information before an offer is made. It's in direct contrast to the typical job previews that most managers give during the interview stage—carefully worded descriptions that sell the positive aspects of the new job and the organization. All these do is set up the employee with false expectations. No job or organization is perfect. And you're more likely to keep your new hires if you're straight with them from the beginning.

Why do RJPs reduce turnover?

The evidence indicates that this openness enhances the perception in applicants of the organization's honesty.

When the information that a job applicant receives is excessively inflated, a number of things happen that have potentially

negative effects on the organization. First, mismatched applicants who would probably become dissatisfied with the job and soon quit are less likely to voluntarily select themselves out of the search process. Second, the absence of negative information builds unrealistic expectations. If hired, the new employee is likely to become quickly disappointed. This, in turn, leads to low employee satisfaction and premature resignations. Finally, the new hires are prone to becoming disillusioned and less committed to the organization when they come face-to-face with the negatives in the job. No one likes to feel as if he or she was tricked or misled during the hiring process.

An RJP balances both the positive and negative aspects of the job. For instance, in addition to positive comments, managers could tell candidates that there are limited opportunities to talk with coworkers during work hours, or that erratic fluctuations in workloads create considerable stress on employees during rush periods.

The evidence indicates that applicants who have been given a realistic job preview hold lower and more realistic expectations about the job they'll be doing and are better prepared for coping with the job and its frustrating elements. Job satisfaction is also increased because new hires see that their employer has been honest and forthright in its recruitment efforts. The result is fewer unexpected resignations. While presenting only the positive aspects of a job to a recruit may initially entice him or her to join the organization, it may be a marriage that both you and the new employee will quickly regret.

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