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## Hiring Guidelines for Today's Nonprofits

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Nonprofits are hiring again. Organizations are emerging from the economic turbulence and market changes of the past two years and are looking for strategic ways to renew and enhance their capacity to provide services by bringing back and — in many cases — adding staff.

The nonprofit of today is substantively different from the nonprofit organization of just a few years ago. Today, nonprofit managers must deal with more complex and faster-paced work environments, a greater-than-ever demand for transparency and accountability, pervasive developments in technology, and greater competition for limited resources. In order to build (or re-build) staff, nonprofit managers need to seize the "opportunity side of change" and, now more than ever, to think through how the changes their organizations have undergone in the past few years affect the kind of talent they need to recruit.

Increasingly, nonprofits are also experimenting with new business ideas and attracting new leaders with business skills generally found in the corporate sector. What we are now seeing, with much greater frequency, is corporate executives moving into nonprofits and nonprofit managers bringing business sensibilities to their work. In addition, today's managers must also deal with comprehensive changes in the makeup of the nonprofit workforce itself — a more diverse and often-younger workforce with different job expectations and loyalties than their baby-boomer bosses.

What's more, nonprofits not only face unprecedented competition with each other but are also finding that they must compete with for-profits for qualified workers. The competition factor comes as a surprise to some, particularly those who look at the still-high unemployment rates in the overall national economy and say, "There are plenty of people looking for jobs." A quick analysis shows, however, that simple availability does not equate to hiring success.

In PNP's 2010 Nonprofit Salary Survey, 50 percent of respondents (nonprofit managers) noted that, despite the high unemployment figure, they expect that finding and hiring qualified talent would be difficult in the year ahead. How, then, does a savvy nonprofit manager recruit and retain the qualified staff required by an organization looking not only to survive but to grow in our changed and evolving environment?

Developed by Professionals for Nonprofits (PNP) for its clients, **Ten Basic Guidelines for Hiring in 2011** may be of some help to managers seeking to understand what they need to know to hire effectively.

**1. Always Be on the Lookout.** Managers must deliberately seek to develop sharp recruiting skills by becoming relentless recruiters at all times. When you come across an impressive individual, ask to stay in touch so that when a job opening occurs you can contact him or her immediately. Also ask whether they know of anyone who has exceptional abilities.

**2. Have a Clear "Elevator Speech" to Use When Speaking to Possible Hires.** Managers need to be able to recite in a concise fashion why a job candidate should want to work for their organization. It's important to be able to sell an organization in the most positive way to someone who may become part of the organization (as well as to those "outside" the organization).

**3. Look for "Fit," Not Just a Good Resume.** Managers shouldn't just search for the best candidate, they should look for the right candidate. Numerous studies have shown that employees are more apt to stay with an organization when the fit is right. Therefore, it is vitally important for a manager to have a sound, internalized grasp of the culture of their organization and be able to recognize with insight and accuracy the kind of employee who will thrive in that environment.

**4. Don't Try to Build Staff Capacity on the Cheap.** Salaries in the nonprofit sector for highly skilled talent have been improving, as have bonuses, benefits, and educational and career development options. Nonprofit managers in 2011 should be prepared to offer salaries that are fair, compelling, and competitive. The most important defense in this highly competitive market is bring able to offer salaries that are similar to, or slightly exceed, those offered by similar organizations.

Research shows that if an organization offers salaries and benefits that are not in line with those being offered by similar nonprofits, it won't be able to compete successfully for talent no matter how sterling its reputation or how compelling its mission.

**5. Develop Clear, Precise, and Accurate Job Descriptions.** Successful managers have job descriptions written in advance for any position opening so that they are ready to act when the need arises. But they do not hire only on the basis of the skill set detailed in the job description — or in a candidate's resume. The job description should clearly state the essential requirements and qualifications for the position. The effective manager, however, will look beyond this baseline for attributes that make for exceptional employees, things like curiosity and a willingness to learn, enthusiasm, quick intelligence, a good work ethic, and the demonstrated ability to be part of a team.

**6. Interview Well and Vigorously.** This is an acquired skill that managers must purposefully learn and practice. A Harvard Business School study shows that more than 75 percent of turnover in organizations can be attributed to poor and inadequate interview sessions, practices, and processes. If a nonprofit manager has an appropriate and well-crafted job description and knows how to interview well, s/he is much more likely to hire the "right" employee.

**7. Pay Attention to Your Instincts.** Studies show that an employer makes the decision to hire or not hire someone within the first thirty seconds of an interview — the rest is "filler" or verification. This means that most managers rely on intuition. Instinct and intuition can be refined and honed by attention to detail. With practice and self-examination, your instinctual judgments will improve over time.

**8. Develop Greater Speed by Acting Quickly.** Act quickly and be decisive. When the "right" candidate is found, hire quickly. Here again, research demonstrates that organizations all too often lose a desired hire by taking too long to make a concrete offer, giving the candidate more opportunity and reason to accept another offer.

**9. Make a Point of Knowing When and How to Use a Search Firm.** If a manager is not seeing the right kind of candidates when important staffing decisions are at stake, a good search firm can help focus the energy and effort of the organization toward achieving the best result. Because a search firm relies on a strong network of contacts, it can reach out in ways not available to the average manager and conduct a wider, more effective search.

**10. Remember that Retaining Staff is the Ultimate Goal.** Retaining good people is as important as recruiting new ones — and often is more cost-effective. The retention of high-performing staff should be a priority for every nonprofit manager. This objective is accomplished by constant and continuous development of staff as well as development of an organizational atmosphere and infrastructure that is supportive of all employees.

Studies prove that the vast majority of employees stay with an organization in which they feel valued and appreciated. Providing for professional and career growth, paying fair and competitive salaries, and offering generous benefits are vital ways to ensure that an organization retains good staff — an organization's most important resource.