LOOKING TO HIRE IN 2018?
BE SURE YOU’RE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

All of us at Security Bank want to wish you a Happy and Prosperous New Year! With the new year comes new challenges and opportunities. In 2018, you may be looking to hire new employees in your business. We came across this article that has some great pointers for asking deeper questions that may shed light on whether a candidate is a good fit. The article talks about farm operations, but the same principles would apply to any small commercial business as well. As always, please do not hesitate to request topics that are of concern to you and your business!

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TOP 3 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EVERY FARM (AND SMALL BUSINESS) SHOULD ASK

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Have you ever hired someone only to be sadly disappointed in your pick within the first few weeks? Farmers often get trapped between two extremes when hiring: We rely on our gut to read people through casual conversation and never dig deeper, or we rely too heavily on the individual's background and ignore character flaws.

When determining if someone will be a strong long-term fit and high contributor to the team, we need to look at a combination of skills and who they are. Strong candidates don’t necessarily have to come with a farming background as long as transferable skills are present. For example, when hiring an operator, basic knowledge and a comfort level with larger equipment in military or construction might be the perfect fit sans farming experience.

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As important, if not arguably more important than the transferable skills, are the individual traits of the person. We need to work to understand how they think, what they enjoy and what their motivations are. Those key indicators will lead to a more solid conclusion if they are a fit for the job and the team. These are three must-have interview questions that will allow you to better understand each candidate.

**IN YOUR PAST JOBS, OF THE VARIOUS TASKS, ROLES AND PROJECTS, WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED DOING THE MOST AND WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED THE LEAST?**

This question is geared to learn what they have a passion for and if you have work on your farm that aligns with what they enjoy. Their resume might be filled with equipment-operating and maintenance experience, but in asking this question, you discover they love to operate and they hate to work on equipment. Just because they can do that work doesn’t mean they prefer to. If the role you have is 50% maintenance, you will want to explore further if this is the right job for them. A follow-up question is asking the reasons for leaving one job and moving to another. The answer to these movements indicates what the candidate values and what’s important to them in a company.

**WHAT IS YOUR SUPERPOWER; WHAT IS IT THAT YOU ARE NATURALLY GOOD AT AND BRING TO THE TABLE WHEREVER YOU WORK?**

If you look at everyone on your current team, each person has something of value they bring the table. You might have someone who is the “technology guy,” the “cautious one” or the “team builder.” Find out what characteristic is a natural tendency of the candidate and consider if that brings value to your farm.

A follow-up question would be to explore their weaker areas. Questions such as: What’s the toughest feedback you’ve ever received or in what areas you feel you still need to grow? How they answer a question about their weaker aspects tells a lot about a person. My best candidates often struggle with sharing about their best quality and give a laundry list of areas to improve. It’s not because they are an incompetent hire; they’re simply humble and always looking to improve.

**IF WE SPOKE TO YOUR CO-WORKERS AND MANAGERS AND ASKED THEM WHAT’S IT LIKE TO WORK WITH YOU, HOW WOULD THEY DESCRIBE YOU?**

This is one of our favorite, go-to questions. Most candidates are taken by surprise and haven’t given it a lot of thought as to how someone would describe them. You’ll typically get genuine answers to this question, as it takes a different angle. I had a candidate that wasn’t as articulate on the phone. When I asked him this question, he said he is somewhat of an introvert, he said he is working on it, but not much of a talker at work. He said people might describe him as quiet but excellent with equipment. That sheds a new perspective on his interview. He’s an excellent mechanic and was a great hire for our client. Getting an understanding of the answer to this question helps with onboarding a new person. You already have some insight to how they might interact with you on a daily basis and how they would best be managed.

Farm managers have a tendency to place too much emphasis on someone’s work history and not enough emphasis on whether they are a fit for the farm. Smart people, with the right attitude, motivation and natural tendencies that align with the farm, will get up to speed quickly. Hiring someone with far less experience with the right inherent traits will yield a high-producing, long-term employee.

We’re seeing a trend as the dynamics on the farm are changing along with the talent needed to support the operation. There’s a reason we’re seeing more engineers on farms and individuals from other industries. The progressive farm operations have already come to the realization you need to look at the whole package someone is bringing to the table and pay attention less to what’s listed on the resume. Just ask my most recent client who mentioned some of his hires have no agriculture experience. One has a sociology degree. In his words, “We have to find the right person.”

(AG/SK)
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