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PDSA Special Report

How to Hire and Terminate
Developers

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Hiring developers is a tricky business. Some developers can "talk" a really good game in an interview, only for you to find out later that they really don't know what they are doing. This is, of course, after you have spent a great deal of time, money and effort trying to use the skills they professed to have. Then there is the issue of how to terminate those developers that are not performing to your expectations. All of these things can be very challenging and even frustrating. However, with a little forethought, and a good process in place, you can limit or completely eliminate these frustrations.

The Job Posting

One of the first things you need to do is to put a lot of thought into your job posting. Don't just put up a generic "Software Developer Wanted" ad. You need to be very specific in what you are looking for. If you are looking for a corporate-type developer that has at least 3 years' experience, and must follow corporate standards, then say that. Don't be afraid that you will scare people off by saying something that you don't think they want to hear. Those are exactly the people you do want to scare off. You want people that will fit in with your culture and your way of doing things, not "cowboys" (or "cowgirls") who only want to do what they want to do. If you are looking for a developer that can also be an analyst and be able to talk to customers, then again you need to say that.

Where do you place your ad? There are a number of places, but it seems most developers hang out on Dice and Monster. Use these two services to place your ad. Be aware that you will get resumes from locations other than your local area. You should put into your ad that you will only accept resumes from "local" developers if that is what you are looking for. Be sure to define what "local" means to you.

Interviewing Developers

After you have received a good set of resumes and have decided which ones you wish to call for an interview, be prepared with your list of questions. There are two sets of questions you will want to have available. One set of questions is for the phone interview, and one set is for the in-person interview.

The phone interview questions should be more related around who they are as a person. Do they want to be contractor, or are they looking to be an employee? What positions have they held before? What do they like about programming, what do they not like? What are their short-term and long-term goals? Some important things to consider before asking that person to come in for an interview is; do you like the way they talk, do you think they would fit into your culture, what salary are they looking for, and is that in your budget?

Once they come in for an interview you will want to focus more on their technical ability and how they look and act as a person. You should have a set of prepared questions and the answers for those questions that are representative of the type of development they will do for you. You need to ask them each question and record their answer. It is best if you can assign some sort of point scale to the questions so you can compare one candidate to another. If you are hiring a .NET developer, have a set of 10-20 .NET questions that represent things they should know to be able to work at your shop. If they will also have to work with SQL Server, have another 5-10 questions prepared on this topic as well.

All the questions you prepare should be used as a guideline for how well that candidate will fit into your organization. If your questions are not reflective of the type of work they will be doing, then you are not going to end up hiring the right person. So where should you get these questions? Ask each of your current developers to give you 2-3 questions that are things that they have done in their work recently. You can then build these into your set of interview questions.

The Hiring Process

Once you have made your decision on the developer you wish to hire, you should have a process for how you actually hire that person. You will need to have a checklist that covers all the things you are going to offer that person for working for your company, governmental forms, the company rules, and the setup of their workspace. A sample check list might be the following:

The Offer

- Offer Letter
- Salary
- Job Title

- Job Responsibilities
- Vacation/Personal Time
- Sick Days
- Hours of Work
- Overtime
- Start Date
- Termination Procedures

First Day Forms

- Employee Contact
- Employee Handbook
- Standard Government Forms for Payroll, etc.
- Healthcare Coverage options
- 401(k) options

Workspace

- Physical location
- Desk
- Computer
- Phone
- Domain login id
- Email Account

You may have other items that you need to have them fill out, but the above should be a good starting checklist. Use this checklist to ensure you have all the necessary items prepared for them when they walk in the door.

Roles and Responsibilities

Part of the employee handbook should be a list of the roles and responsibilities for each position in your company as it relates to IT. If you are hiring a person in as a junior programmer, then they should know what their responsibilities are in that role. You also need to make them aware of what the responsibilities are for them to advance to the next level within your organization. People like to know what to expect of them and how they can advance. If you lack this type of guidance, people will become frustrated, bug you constantly about how they are doing, and what they can do to earn more money or advance within the company. By having these roles and responsibilities outlined in writing, people can focus on their job and also concentrate on how to move to the next step in their career.

When to Terminate a Developer

Just as important as hiring developers is how to terminate developers. All of the items you have prepared in your interview, your offer letter, your employee handbook, and the roles and responsibilities have set the stage for what you expect from your employees. So if someone is not living up to these expectations it is a clear path for you to tell that person in which areas they are failing. The firing of a developer should be no surprise for you or that person because you have a clear set of rules that they should be following.

One of the most important pieces you should have in your employee handbook, or employee contract is an "Employee-at-Will" clause. This states that each employee can be let go at the company's discretion for any reason. You should check with your lawyer as not all states in the US allow this type of clause. And in many other countries outside the US, this type of clause is most likely illegal. So be sure to see legal counsel before implementing such a clause. However, even with this cause you want to have documented proof of why you are letting that person go.

Your termination procedures need to be spelled out in each employee's handbook. If your company gives 2 weeks compensation, then say that. If you do not give any compensation, also say that. If you walk people out the door with no chance to get anything off their work computer, then you need to outline this up-front. Be sure to get back any keys, credit cards, or other company property prior to letting that person leave. Hold back their final

paycheck until all company property is returned. Having a good termination process is just as vital as having a good hiring process.

Summary

Having a good process in place for hiring and terminating developers is essential to running an efficient IT organization. Be sure to let people know what is expected of them, what the working hours are, what their career path is, how you will review their performance, and what would constitute grounds for firing them.

If you want more detailed information on IT management practices check out the PDSA Agile ALM product (<http://www.pdsa.com/agile>). This product has all of the ideas expressed in this special report, and more, in one easy-to-use package.

Contact Information

If you would like to know more about the information in this special report, please contact either Paul D. Sheriff or Michael Krasowski at PDSA.

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