

Should You Hire an Overqualified Candidate?



In the current economy, we are seeing more people apply for roles that appear to be below their skills and experience level due to finding themselves out of work, returning to New Zealand from overseas, or as a result of changes in certain industries. Employers have traditionally hesitated to recruit overqualified candidates for fear that they will demand too high a salary, get bored quickly or jump ship as soon as a more attractive opportunity comes about.

While these risks do apply in some instances, there are also many advantages to hiring these highly experienced people.

Here, we tackle some of the misconceptions about overqualified candidates and reveal the key considerations you should keep in mind when bringing on these people to ensure you get the best outcome for your business.

The Truth About Overqualified Candidates

The concept of being “overqualified” is more complex than it might seem, and it’s important to understand the nuances when making a hiring decision.

It’s common to confuse being highly educated or experienced with having the ability to do a job. Someone who has invested a lot into upskilling and studying won’t necessarily have practical industry experience and therefore would not expect to move straight into a senior role. Likewise, a person with a long career history may not have the experience required for the role if what they do have is from within an unrelated job or industry.

Also, keep in mind that a company’s culture is closely tied to its approach to candidates with a lot of experience. In many cases, the cultural fit of a candidate is even more important than whether they meet or exceed the role requirements. If an overqualified candidate shares your organisation’s values

and is enthusiastic about your vision, they may be a less risky hire than someone who is on the right level but is a poor culture fit.

Key Things to Consider When Hiring an Overqualified Candidate

Today's economic climate offers a valuable opportunity to attract uniquely skilled and experienced talent that will add real value to your business, but the key to making the most of an overqualified candidate is knowing how to manage the risks of recruiting them.



If you're thinking about hiring an overqualified candidate for your role, we recommend reflecting on the following questions:

Why are they applying for the role?

When screening an applicant that exceeds the role requirements, try to get to the heart of why they are interested in the position. What is motivating them to accept a role with less responsibility or lower pay? Some candidates may be looking to take a step back to achieve more work/life balance (for example, if they have a young family), while others may want to change industries, relocate to a new place, move away from management positions to roles they enjoy more or pursue more fulfilling work.

By understanding the individual's rationale and long-term objectives, you can determine whether they are genuinely invested in your role or see it as a short-term solution. One of the simplest ways to establish this in the interview is by asking questions such as "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Regardless, it always pays to speak to the candidate and learn what's driving them, rather than make a decision based on their resume alone.

What is their preferred work style?

The candidate's work style has a big impact on whether they will be a successful hire. In the interview and when speaking to referees, try to find out about their leadership abilities, how well they accept feedback, how they deal with conflict and whether the applicant prefers to work alone or in a team.

Managers often worry that they will struggle to lead someone who is overqualified for a position, so it's a good idea to consider the skills, experience and confidence of the relevant manager before hiring and to be clear with the candidate about the scope and responsibilities of the role. Generally, however, if the manager is secure, open to others' ideas and the candidate's working style meshes well with the rest of the team, an overqualified person can be an advantage rather than a source of conflict.

What long-term value could they bring to the business?

The traditional approach to hiring is to identify a vacancy and find a candidate to fill it, however, in

today's world, it's worthwhile to consider the talent opportunities available in the market and reflect on your organisation's requirements not just now but in the future.

Experienced professionals have the potential to bring significant long-term benefits to a business because of their experience. When assessing an applicant who is overqualified for the job opening, it's essential to:

- Be clear about what the role involves and what prospects there may be later down the track
- Determine whether there is room to expand or reshape the role to utilise the candidate's expertise
- Think about how you can provide opportunities for them to mentor others, challenge their peers and contribute in new ways

Summary

While hiring an overqualified candidate requires some forethought, it can also bring unparalleled advantages for both your Technology function and your organisation as a whole. If you're looking to invest in people who will help to advance your business well into the future, **reach out** to our team of IT recruitment specialists today.