

MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hiring Staff

Aussie Managers Clueless

A quick glance through this week's newspaper revealed the following stories:

- **“Biennale in sexual harassment scandal”**: the former head of people and culture was fired after she complained about being sexually harassed by her manager.
- **“Covid con’s threat”**: A man hired as a telephone helpline call-taker talked his way into a woman's home up and threatened to have her deported unless she provided sexual favours to him.
- **“\$125Billion Loop Hole”**: state parliaments’ budget watchdog concluded that construction of the Suburban Rail Loop will cost more than double the original quote of \$50 billion dollars.
- **“National Disability Insurance Agency boss resigns”**: the agency had been accused of wasteful spending on private lawyers to battle participants in the courts after spiking appeals against reduction in funding packages.
- **“Toddlers escape Gold Coast childcare centre”**: two very young children escaped and were running toward a busy street when stopped by bystanders.

Clearly something is very wrong in all of these cases. Yet, this is hardly an exercise in blaming managers. How could it be otherwise?

People are promoted into leadership positions with the assumption that they know how to hire staff. Very few have had any formal training in how to do this most important part of the job.

Corporate Psychologist Dr. Ken Byrne said that each of these examples reveals a dramatic failure in the basic hiring process.

No project is ever costed perfectly. Yet managing an overrun of \$125 billion is more than the average person can make sense of. This of course is merely money. Other examples reveal dramatic threats to the safety of toddlers and adults.

Dr Byrne said that it's likely the people making hiring decisions violated one or more of what he calls the **Five Guiding Principles of Staff Selection**.

1. Start with the best question. Typically a recruitment drive begins by asking "*How will we fill this job?*" Not a bad question, but not the best.

Asking the question "*What will it cost us if we hire the wrong person?*" has a way of focusing the mind.

2. Hiring for claimed skills rather than character. Byrne points out that character outweighs skills every time. All things being equal, you can teach people what they need to know. What you can't teach are things like being able to accept feedback graciously; basic kindness; the ability to learn from one's mistakes; willingness to work cooperatively with others; a basic work ethic or honesty.

All of these are characteristics are built in during childhood. For the most part, the candidate has them or doesn't. No amount of coaching, discipline, or cajoling will correct for these deficiencies.

3. What interview questions will we ask? All too often interviews are conducted by casual conversations, with interviewers making up questions on the spot. Fifty years of psychological research has shown that this is one of the biggest causes of hiring mistakes.

4. **Who will check references?** This is perhaps the weakest part of any hiring procedure. Often it is skipped entirely, or left to a junior person who has no role in the hiring procedure. Sometimes it's a quick "yes" or "no" series of a few questions.

5. **Hiring quickly and firing slowly.** All too often hiring decisions are made quickly. There is pressure to get someone on board. People doing the hiring are being dragged away from what they see as their "real job". All of this combines to put invisible pressure to get someone in the job quickly.

Actually, this formula should be reversed. Hiring should be done slowly and carefully. When it's clear the basic character flaws are interfering with the person's ability to do the job, they should be removed promptly.

Dr Byrne, who has more than forty years experience assessing job candidates from the most senior to the most junior roles, across a wide variety of industries, wrote a book to help hiring managers. [Seeing Behind the Applicants Mask Before You Hire: Secrets of a Corporate Psychologist](#) outlines these mistakes and how to prevent them.

In his opinion "It would be a useful exercise for each of these businesses to go back and calculate what the real cost was of hiring these people. The easy part is calculating the recruitment and training expenses. What's much harder, and much more important, is to consider all of the invisible costs such as damage to reputation, risk of potential lawsuits and impact on organizational culture."

The most important, and yet difficult to calculate number is the Opportunity Cost. Dr Byrne suggests that these businesses ask "*Where would we be now if we had hired a basically competent person?*"

Profile

Dr Byrne is a Corporate Psychologist who has been in practice for over 40 years. He specializes in serving as a second opinion for businesses thinking of hiring or promoting a candidate.

He has provided advice to Coles-Myer; The Walt Disney Corporation; Australia Post; Optus; Tattersalls and a host of businesses in the SME sector.