

READY – FIRE – AIM

GARY A. CLUFF

“Why is it so hard to land a new job?”

This question is the common cry of the modern-day job seeker. I know this because I have several friends and family members who serve as my “secret shoppers” by telling me their horror stories after each of their interviewing experiences. These stories would make great fodder for a reality television series. It could be the counterpoint to “The Apprentice” where Mr. Trump gets to say, “You’re Fired!” but, in this case, the suspense-filled punch line we would all wait to hear would be: “You’re Hired!”

Actually, we don’t need a reality television show to know how poorly many companies manage their interviewing and selection processes. Most of us have experienced it firsthand. We consider ourselves lucky when we get invited by a company for an interview. However, when we get there, we encounter a series of interviews with a number of different people who, in many cases, seem to have totally unrelated agendas. We silently ask ourselves, “Do these people even know what job I am applying for?” or, “Why does everybody ask me the exact same questions?” or, “Is this some kind of endurance test?” Then, we leave, exhausted, and wait for days, or even weeks, hoping that we’ll finally hear those magic two words – “You’re Hired!” But, since there can be only one winner, too often we are told “Thanks, but we don’t have an appropriate opportunity for you at this time.” Gee, isn’t that special?

One of my secret shoppers told me recently that she had been advised by another, experienced job seeker to “avoid being the first one interviewed—at all costs.” Sadly, there is some sound logic behind this advice. Managers who interview without a complete, well-defined profile of the skills and competencies required of a successful candidate will probably need the experience of interviewing a candidate or two to help them calibrate their thinking.

All too typically, many interviewing processes can be described as Ready–Fire–Aim. In these organizations, the manager who has a vacancy to fill asks his HR person to provide him with resumes of candidates who possess a very general set of educational and experiential qualifications. As soon as resumes are provided, the interviews begin.

This common problem is simply a failure to define what it is needed in a new worker so that all those who serve as interviewers will be able to identify a qualified candidate when they meet one. Otherwise, the natural tendency is to compare candidates one against another, often resulting in the selection of someone with whom they think they would like to work versus hiring someone who meets or exceeds the requirements and will complement the existing team or organization.

In my many years of recruiting, I have found that those organizations that identify the target—or aim—of their searches before they start interviewing will fill their jobs more quickly and make fewer hiring mistakes. The seat-of-the-pants, I’ll-know-it-when-I-see-it approach is far less efficient and fraught with peril.

If you are a recruiting professional, your customer—the hiring manager—will appreciate you in the long run if you help him determine his “aim” at the outset of the process.

If you are a job seeker, I can only hope that you will soon find yourself in the bulls-eye!