First Positioning Is as Important to Your Startup as First Impressions Are to Your Career

First impressions are important in hiring, but too many CEOs and managers neglect an important step in the process: First positioning. This entails paving the way for a new hire to be successful, starting with your existing team before a candidate is hired. The negative effects of bad first positioning are felt at the employee, team and department levels but are amplified when the *CEO* gets it wrong — I should know since I've done it wrong many times.

Here is first positioning done wrong: Springing a new employee on your existing staff with little notice or context. As a leader responsible for hiring, you may see that your existing team isn't performing some key function. You identify the need and move quickly to hire the perfect candidate. You then introduce her to the group and are shocked when they don't embrace their new colleague.

What happened?

You assumed that your team perceived a similar need in the organization, even though on a day-to-day basis they don't have your management perspective. Worse, people may feel threatened, thinking that this interloper is taking over parts of their own jobs. Others may be hurt that you didn't appoint them to the position, especially if they believe it would have been a promotion.

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Your lack of context-setting puts the new hire in a difficult situation: On day one, many employees already resent them. The good impression you and your company made on the candidate during the hiring process is quickly tainted.

So how do you get first positioning right? Here are four steps to help you avoid the same error.

1. Socialize the need.

Spend time visiting with your team about the need you see in the organization. It can be as simple as, “I’ve been thinking it would be good if we had someone who could spend more time on X. What do you all think?” This gives the group an opportunity to consider this and speak up if they see it as their own responsibility or have a different perspective.

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2. Ask for names.

Give the team a chance to refer candidates. This gesture may not only give you a good lead but also insures that they are more invested in the new person’s success. Also, this gives anyone who thinks the position should be theirs a chance to apply.

3. Clearly define the job’s responsibilities.

Draw clear lines on the new employee’s duties. A formal job description will provide clarity to the entire group and help you hire the right candidate. It will also prevent him from straying into what is rightly someone else’s turf.

4. Enlist the team’s help in onboarding.

A formal onboarding program will facilitate more swift and effective collaboration between the new person and the existing team. Enlist the group’s help to insure their new colleague has everything needed to hit the ground running. Department welcome lunches, a mentor or buddy and meetings with every executive will help them quickly feel connected to the team and the company.

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Moving fast to fill a void in your organization is a good thing. Lack of good first positioning is not. Use these tactics to not only set up your new employee for success but also maintain a cohesive team dynamic.

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