



HIRING RIGHT

Selecting Employees with Christlikeness, Competence, and Chemistry

By Stephen G. Reel

The interview was not going well. Mrs. Smith, a veteran teacher, fidgeted nervously as she struggled to answer the principal's questions about her classroom management policies, biblical integration, and academic assessment strategies. It had been some time since she had been in a job interview, but her family's recent transfer to another city made this a necessary reality. She breathed a sigh of relief when it was over, though she knew she probably would not get the position. As she was leaving the principal's office, he casually asked her what she would miss most about her previous school. Without any hesitation, she gushed with story after story—some with tears and others with laughter—about her students, her school, and her colleagues. Her obvious love for her students and her desire to equip them spiritually and academically quickly overshadowed the failed interview. She got the job!

"Hiring right" is probably the most important thing a Christian school leader will ever do. Every position in the school carries with it the potential of effectively accomplishing the mission—or actively preventing it. Most leaders understand this, but when their backs are against the proverbial wall to fill a critical position within the schedule demands of a school year, they may be tempted to choose convenience over conscience. The most costly decisions I ever made in my career were related to hiring—especially

at the last minute. We should heed the warning of Proverbs 26:10, which says, "Like an archer who wounds at random is one who hires a fool or any passer-by."

So how can we know we are hiring right? While there are many methods from which to choose, the best decisions result from being able to discern if the applicant is the right person for the job. Consider these three "C's" of hiring: Christlikeness, competence, and chemistry.

Christlikeness

The apostle Paul said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Students in our schools are in the process of becoming like their teachers and coaches. Jesus said, "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher" (Luke 6:40). In order for students to grow in Christlikeness, they must have Christlike role models. Christian school leaders must carefully research applicants by way of detailed interviews, careful reference checks, and spiritual discernment to ensure all school employees are closely following Jesus Christ. I believe it is important to pay close attention to applicants (both in what they write and speak) to understand what is truly in their hearts. Jesus said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). The message of Christ should be richly dwelling in them and freely

flowing out of their conversation. This can also be verified by talking with those who can validate the spiritual fruit in the life of applicants.

Competence

It is surprising to see the number of résumés and applications submitted for posted positions from individuals who lack the necessary education, skill, and experience. A school leader must vigilantly screen candidates early in the hiring process to ensure only those who are competent are being considered for the position. It can be helpful to go beyond the information applicants provide by testing their skills, reviewing their portfolios, shadowing them while they perform practice lessons, and investigating more deeply into their work histories and relational proficiencies that may reveal competency or lack thereof. Often the best employees to hire are those who have already been working at the school in a temporary or trial capacity, such as substitute teachers, summer project workers, or high-level volunteers. This allows for extended observation and assessment of strengths and abilities with less risk.

One mistake to avoid is sympathy hiring. It can be tempting to hire parents who need school employment in order to enroll their children, even though they lack the necessary skills for the job. It is also difficult to terminate such employees if they are unable to perform their job. Making an investment on the front end of hiring to ensure competency will yield strong results for many years to come.

Chemistry

It is commonly reported that missionaries rarely leave the field prematurely because of difficult conditions. Rather, they tend to leave because they cannot get along with other missionaries. I wonder how true this statement might be for Christian schools.

It is imperative that school leaders hire people who have a proven track record of loving relationships, a strong sense of team, and a demonstrated ability to contribute positively to the overall culture of the school. I have found it helps to place a multiplication exponent on anything that gives me pause about a prospective employee's application, references, or interview. These are often the things that will be magnified in the workplace and have a negative effect upon others in the school community. Whenever possible, it is helpful to have prospective employees spend time with others in the department in casual conversations, team-building

exercises, or events to gain a perspective of potential chemistry. Conducting a personality inventory before hiring is another way to determine a good fit with the team. A 90-day probationary period for all new hires is encouraged; this can provide an exit strategy if needed.

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Remember, *contract renewal is hiring!* Before renewing employees' contracts, school leaders should give prayerful and thorough consideration to evaluating if current employees have the Christlikeness, competency, and chemistry necessary for their positions. If they do, encourage them in tangible ways; they are your greatest assets. If they do not, help them grow through consistent evaluation, professional development, and accountability until they meet the required standards of excellence or can be reassigned to a more suitable role.

Christian schools belong to God. They are wonderful places where He establishes a group of skilled artisans who are tools in His hands to equip students—His masterpieces—to do the good things He has prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). Our job is to act as stewards, carefully focusing our attention upon His leading in the hiring process—not caving in to circumstances.

In closing, Psalm 123:1–2 is often my prayer when I am trying to determine the best person to hire for a position:

To you I lift up my eyes,
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
Behold, as the eyes of servants
look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maidservant
to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he has mercy upon us.

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