

“BE CAREFUL WHEN HIRING A CANDIDATE’S SPOUSE”



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With talent at a premium, candidates are well positioned to command certain conditions for accepting employment. Many of these professionals have spouses who have good jobs or careers that will be disrupted when they accept new employment that will require the couple to relocate. It is not uncommon for an in-demand candidate to ask for employment assistance for his or her spouse (or partner or significant other) a condition of employment.

In their excitement to get the candidate of choice on board, many organizations will comply with the condition by hiring the partner directly. Many do not realize, however, that if not handled well, this situation could create more problems than the original candidate is worth.

The following scenario is not uncommon: The primary talent is brought on board and the company works diligently to find a place for the significant other. This person may not be as qualified or competent as other candidates. The partner may be demanding, unmotivated, difficult to work with, or just a poor performer, and other employees are left walking on egg-shells so as not to upset the situation.

“We have tried talking to him, but his behavior hasn’t changed.” said the manager of the relocated employee’s spouse, “He’s clearly leveraging this situation, feeling he’s ‘untouchable.’ The other employees see his getting away with this. It creates resentment and morale issues for those who work hard and are held accountable to organizational standards.”

When the rest of the management team and human resources allow this kind of situation to occur unchallenged, it diminishes the effectiveness of the entire department. When a spouse is allowed to be an exception to acceptable business behavior and performance standards so as not to displease a “special” or hard-to-replace employee, it is sending an unhealthy message to the organization.

The best way to handle this situation is at the very beginning, before both parties come on board. There are ways that you can assist the partner without taking on the responsibility for hiring the person directly. While somewhat time consuming, the better solution is to use internal or external resources to help the spouse secure employment within the new community, but not with you.

If you do choose to hire the spouse, you need to let both the desired candidate and the spouse know that both are expected to be held to the same performance standards as other employees in the organization. Then, should the issue need to be addressed down the road, there will have been an up-front understanding and acknowledgement by all parties.

What should you do if there was no up-front agreement? The best way is to address any performance issues directly with the employee who is not meeting the standard. As with all other employees, pursue progressive discussions and offer opportunities to improve. Every effort should be made to help remedy the situation. Consider a change to a more suitable role, or hire a performance coach.

If all else fails, consider supporting the person in re-directing their career outside the organization with outplacement assistance. While the affected employee and desirable partner may not be happy with these actions, the message to the larger employee base about your organizational values, standards and expectations must take precedence.

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