7 Common Hiring Mistakes
And How To Avoid Them

By William Vanderbloemen
President/CEO
Vanderbloemen Search Group

What's the most expensive hiring process ever? It's the one that leads to a bad hire. And the cost is probably more than you think.

Hiring can be scary, filled with many unknowns, but unless you want to be a solo pastor in a church of "us four and no more," you'll have to add to your team sooner or later. In our work with thousands of pastors and churches, we have the privilege of observing many hiring processes from a bird's eye view – some that go very well, and some that go poorly.

Whenever we see a hiring process that goes awry, we've noticed that it often happens for the same reasons. We've seen the seven mistakes listed below over and over. Avoid these mistakes and you'll be well on your way to making good hires that are productive and not costly.

Mistake #1: Wait Too Long To Start Hiring

I was once told, "There are no interruptions in ministry, because all of ministry is an interruption." If you are a pastor, you know the heart of that statement. Sunday comes with amazing regularity. Hospital visits, crises in leadership, and church functions that pop up at the last minute make the tyranny of the urgent a stark reality for pastors.

But too often, responding to the immediate means putting off the important. Every summer, we get regular calls from pastors who have lost their student pastor, have no idea who they should reach out to as a replacement, put off starting the hiring process, and now really need the new youth pastor there before school starts.

Don't get caught in this situation, if you can at all prevent it. We encourage our clients to be thinking about hiring before it's needed. We also encourage them to build a pipeline of potential hires.

Fix it: Make a list of your three most critical (and hard to replace) team members. Underneath each of their names, write down three ideas about where to find their replacement. Even better, think of other people on staff you can train up beneath them who have potential to become their successor.

Mistake #2: Hire Too Quickly (Since You Waited Too Long To Start)

If there is one cardinal sin of church staffing that I see repeated most, it's this: churches hire too quickly, and they fire too slowly.

Usually after waiting too long to hire, churches are then backed into the corner of needing to have their new staff member there sooner rather than later. The important has now also become urgent. Too often, this scenario is followed by the church hiring the first decent candidate that comes along. I can count on my hand the number of times I've seen that work out.

Fix It: Manage expectations. When a staff vacancy arises, let the church and your team know that the most prudent path is to be diligent and discerning in hiring, and that may mean that the hiring will go slowly. Remind them that hiring poorly is far more expensive than hiring slowly.

Additionally, develop an interim plan now for the day that your key team members leave. Having a plan in place will help your congregation and your team endure the interim time and will give you a good word to communicate when news of a staff loss hits the public.

Mistake #3: Hire Someone Because You "Know" Them

Hiring is an anxiety-ridden task. The root of that anxiety is the fear of the unknown.

Chances are, you're either replacing someone that you know, love, and are sad to see leave, or you're replacing someone that you thought you knew and with whom you're disappointed and/or upset with in the wake of their (sometimes necessary) departure.

Either way, replacing that person with someone you don't know feels really scary, and rightly so. I'm a big believer of hiring from within, but that only works a certain percentage of the time. So what happens when there's nobody within the church or staff that can fill your open position?

We see this often. A church will hire someone the pastor "knows" from outside the church. Maybe a longtime friend, or a classmate from school, or even worse, someone you've connected with via social media. No matter how little you know them, it feels right, because some of the fear of the unknown is reduced.

But just because you know a person does not mean they will fit your church. In fact, many times personal relationships can cloud the objectivity needed to make a great hire.

Fix It: Have a third set of eyes help you hire. Identify a person in the church that's done a lot of hiring and ask for their help. Caveat: remember hiring in the corporate world doesn't equate to knowledge about hiring in the church world. So bring in an adviser, but take their advice with a (small) grain of salt. Hiring a search firm to consult with you about the hiring process will also provide you with objectivity and staffing best practices.

Mistake #4: Hire A "Rock Star"

If I had a nickel for every time someone calls us to help them find a "rock star," I could fund church planting for all of Asia.

And if I had a nickel for every time I heard about a church that hired a "rock star" and regretted it, I could then cover Africa as well.

Proven performance is a wonderful thing, and it's the best predictor of future performance. But, for a variety of reasons, it's very easy to get caught up in the siren song of a resume that looks great or a candidate that is from a great church, only to discover too late that the hire wasn't right for your church.

Sometimes, a resume from a staff member at a fast-growing church can be someone who isn't causing growth but is riding its coat tails. Other times, serving in a very large church where jobs are incredibly specific doesn't translate to serving in a more normal setting where "other duties as necessary" is on everyone's job description. Also, it's important to weigh the pros and cons of hiring for experience versus hiring for potential. Finally, culture trumps competency every time. Just because someone is a rock star in one culture doesn't mean they will fit in your staff and church culture. Finding someone who matches that is the most important factor of all.

Fix It: When looking at a resume with a lot of impressive experience, develop interview questions that focus on (1) measuring how that individual has been a catalyst for growth, and (2) assessing how the candidate would fit into your team culture.

Mistake #5: Hire Based On Your Amazing Ability To Make "Blink" Decisions

Problem: people often decide within a few minutes whether or not a candidate will "fit." They wear this as a badge of honor. I once read an article where one CEO asserted that interviews shouldn't take more than seven minutes.

When I was a pastor building my team, I used to think I had this trait. I thought I could quickly assess someone's skills, experience, and potential based on their resume and my first interaction with them. But then I realized that my hiring track record for my church was at about a .500 batting average. Half of the time, my blink hiring decisions were dead wrong.

The good news is that hiring really is an act of the gut. However, we all need to use the spiritual gift of discernment. And discernment takes *time*. This is another reason that having an objective set of eyes helping you with your hiring is vital.

Fix It: Take twice as long to interview as you think necessary and ask questions about the areas that your gut tells you are positives or negatives. Include other team members in the interviewing process. And always wait at least a full day before passing final judgment. Rather than making blink hiring decisions, sleep on your decisions, pray over your decisions, and ask others for their input into your decisions.

Mistake #6: Skip The Reference Checks

One of the biggest mistakes you can make in your hiring process is skipping the background and reference checks on your potential new hire. Reference and background checks are your opportunity to protect your church and learn how your candidate has performed on church staffs in the past. At Vanderbloemen Search Group, we conduct the entire reference, background, and credit check process for our clients to ensure they receive a 360 degree view of their potential hire.

Fix It: Delegate who on your staff is to conduct the reference checks for your hires, be it the senior pastor or their direct report, etc. Find and use a reliable company for background checks. The process of conducting church reference and background checks is not intended to dig up dirt on your candidate but for you to get to know your potential new team member better and gain clarity on whether they would be a good fit for your team or not.

Mistake #7: Pay Whatever You Have To

It can be tempting for churches to pay out of line with their overall pay scale in order to get that special candidate. Also, I know more than anyone that pastors are notorious for having special side deals with employees based on their passions and needs. When you only have one other employee that works okay. But the minute you have more than one staff member, that could get messy.

Fix It: Do your research about compensation in churches and for the role you are looking to hire. It's even better if you can get salary data based on your location and church size. Make sure everyone on your staff is in an acceptable range and no one staff member is outside of your overall pay scale, and develop a uniform approach to benefits and non-cash incentives. We conduct [Compensation Analysis Consultations](#) for clients to help them ensure that they are paying their staff reasonably according to their job descriptions, tenure, national averages, and cost of living in a specific area.

Like I said, the most expensive hire you can make is a bad hire. Don't make these mistakes when you hire a new church staff member. Take those extra steps we provided in the "Fix Its" to ensure that your church follows hiring best practices.

TICKET

REGISTERED FOR WEBINAR
Don't forget to mark your calendar!

The 3 Secrets of an Effective Church Staff Structure

Learn the strategies of successful hiring, firing, growing leaders, & church staff structure.

Webinar Date: Thursday, May 26

Webinar Time: 1:00pm EDT / 12:00pm CDT

THE 3 SECRETS OF AN EFFECTIVE CHURCH STAFF STRUCTURE

with Tony Morgan & William Vanderbloemen