



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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The IT Skill Base

Skilled IT professionals are the most difficult to retain. When recruiting an IT team, how "skilled" should the team be? The question here is whether the hirer should look for the knowledge that the candidate possesses or how good he is as a team player.

There should be no distinction between a person's technical knowledge and his manageability at the work place. If a highly skilled technical expert has difficulty getting along with team-mates or his supervisor, then the individual should be given specific feedback about his behavior. Consequences of such behavior should be communicated to the individual. If the person works on improving his relationship with his peers, then management should monitor the progress. On the contrary, if the person continues to behave in the same way, then he needs to be replaced. There are situations where such people cannot be easily replaced due to their high competency levels. Management should then isolate the person and make him an autonomous entity until things are sorted out.

How frequently is the "sign-on" bonus being used for IT professionals across the industry? Is this practice being restricted to specific job skill sets in the IT realm or is its use fairly widespread across all skill sets (e.g. networks, Data Base, Systems, application development, etc.)?

We see this in about half of senior IT hiring situations. The 'sign-on' bonus (amount given to a candidate on signing the appointment letter) is often used in hiring to ensure a commitment from the employee. To retain extremely skilled staff, the employer starts by offering a lower salary. This helps the individual demonstrate his skills and earn the periodical increase in salary. One advantage of this approach is that it takes care of the individual's financial needs and is also a low risk factor to the company.

Recruiters who specialize in hiring foreign IT workers have a hard time judging how well they can read and write English. Employers also wonder about how well they will work with their foreign counterparts. Assessing job-relevant skills is a tough game. It also has to be done in a non-discriminatory way. By conducting pre-hire tests, a person's compatibility with the company and the degree of language fluency can be measured.

Dissatisfaction about compensation is a standard issue in IT firms. No matter how competitive the salary structures are, individuals always feel that they are underpaid. Employers in IT firms need to focus on the technical skill rather than personality traits of the individual. That would be the best solution to retain skilled professionals in the company.