

Hiring the Right People

It's hard!

1. Understand your own main motivation for taking on the job: Is it to do good or to make yourself feel good?

"Feel good" managers hire people they'd like to have a beer with, who make them feel comfortable. This is a risky strategy, since being friendly is not particularly well correlated with being effective. If you are a doer and focused on accomplishment, you will not be focused on your own comfort. And for each potential hire, try to understand what their motives are, also.

Assuming you want to run the best con you can, let's continue.

2. "Ordinary managers hire their peers. Great managers hire their superiors."

It's a scary thing to hire someone who is more experienced than you, is older than you, or is known to be hyper-competent. But if your motive is to do the best job possible, you'll put aside those fears, and take the risk. "If a manager always feels like they have to be the smartest person on the team, they're destined to lose the game." "A manager who is the most competent person on the team has done a poor job of recruiting."

3. Try to learn to distinguish good BSers from good doers.

This is hard, since people who are skilled self-promoters are really good at fooling other people, and if you're a doer, spotting the BS is not going to be one of your strengths. Beware people who can glibly show that each fiasco they were involved with was not their fault! Believe the record and not what people say about themselves. BSers seek the limelight, so be wary.

4. The leopard probably won't change its spots.

So don't bet on it. This time is not likely to be different. It's good to give people a second chance, but keep your second chance budget small and spend it sparingly.

5. Recognize the role of politics: Arguably most bad appointments are due to fannish politics.

Push back on political pressure when you can, and when you can't, don't fool yourself later. It always happens, there are always people who must get jobs due to fannish politics. The people to push back hardest on are the serial incompetents – people who have failed repeatedly. Guess what: they'll probably fail again! (see "Leopards", above.) The people to take a chance on are the unknowns. At least some of them will prove competent. And sometimes the only thing to do is to give in to local politics, and find someone a job with a lot of glory and not a lot of responsibility.

6. Eisenhower's categories. It is instructive to divide people into four categories:

	Lazy	Energetic
Competent	"A tragedy; a waste"	"I can win wars with these"
Incompetent	"Does no harm"	"These will generally ruin you"

Eisenhower was one of the great managerial generals, and led Allied forces to victory in Europe in part because he focused on finding and promoting competence and on finding and quickly firing incompetence. Look at those categories and think about some of the great fiascos and who falls in which.

7. Experience and expertise are over-rated.

It's better to take a chance on a competent-but-inexpert person learning the job than on an incompetent-expert succeeding. (Competent experts are best of all, of course!)

8. Friends don't set up friends to fail.

You are not doing your friends a favor when you put them in a position where they'll fail. Sometimes being a friend means saying "no".

9. New ideas are a dime a dozen.

Inspiration is easy; execution is hard.