

Don't Hire a Former Employee Before Asking These Questions

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Summary. If you have an open position, rehiring a former employee, known as a boomerang, may seem like the easy answer because they already know the company culture, business nuances, and people. But there are several reasons why

they might not be the right... [more](#)

Many employees are on the move, looking for that next opportunity. Perhaps they want a bigger challenge, more money, or believe they need to leave their current company to advance their career. But what if they leave your company and realize the new opportunity wasn't as great as they thought, or they left years ago, gained new skills, and now want to come back? Should you hire them?

Rehiring a former employee, known as a boomerang, may seem like the easy answer because they already know the company culture, business nuances, and people, but there are several reasons why they might not be the right person for the job. Here are five questions managers should ask themselves before hiring a former employee.

Am I hiring the boomerang employee because it seems like the easy option?

The employee knows the company, but is the new job exactly the same as the one they left? Most employees will come back to an employer for a different or more senior role. Consider how they'll adjust to a different role and whether their colleagues will see them as capable of that higher-level position. Check in with their previous manager (if applicable), HR, and cross-functional stakeholders not only about whether the employee should be considered for rehire, but also about their soft skills and ability to adjust to new and dynamic situations. This will help you foresee any roadblocks to the boomerang's success in the new role.

Then think about how they'll fit into the culture of your team. Is it the same team, or has the team changed or grown since they left? If it's a new team, how will the boomerang fit in with the current employees? Will they be managing any former colleagues who

were previously peers? And how will that impact the team dynamics? What will you need to do to ensure a smooth transition for the boomerang and the team?

Finally, do you equate “easier” with “no ramp time?” You may think the boomerang doesn’t need much onboarding, especially if they’re returning to the same team, but companies, teams, and processes grow and change, and they deserve the same amount of ramp time as any new employee. If they get back into the swing of things quickly, then great!

Does the boomerang bring the right skills and capabilities to advance the business?

You’re familiar with the skills and capabilities the employee had before they left the company. What new skills and experience have they gained since leaving? Do those skills match the job description and help advance the business, or are their current and previous skills obsolete compared to where the company is headed? Making sure the boomerang has the skills based on the job responsibilities and business needs is critical to moving the company forward.

Is unconscious bias influencing me?

When employees leave a company, they often keep in touch with former colleagues. If you’ve remained friendly with the boomerang employee and talked to them about a role you’re hiring for, there’s a chance unconscious bias contributed to how you designed the job description. Consider whether you drafted the job description objectively or wrote it to match the potential boomerang’s experience and level, which might not match the business needs.

Unconscious bias could also influence how you manage this friend-employee. Being a “frien-ager” — a friend who becomes a manager — can lead to inequity on the team. What will you do to combat unconscious bias in promotions, performance reviews, and overall strategic conversations?

When a high school friend hired me at NBC, we had a detailed conversation about our expectations as a manager and employee. I was fortunate he was a great boss and provided ample feedback and guidance. If I saw him and his family on the weekends, we did not discuss work or any employee, and when in the office, we didn’t discuss any personal information outside of a group setting. It was a delicate balance that required a level of maturity to not make others feel excluded from “inside jokes” or make them feel that their relationships with the manager were any less meaningful than mine.

The best way to combat unconscious bias is to understand what it is, acknowledge it can exist, and listen to all employees (including the boomerang) equally. A transparent, detailed conversation with all team members about how you expect to behave as their manager and what you expect of them — to tell you if you faltered in your efforts to manage fairly — will help your employees feel empowered to discuss any perceived unfairness and will combat divisiveness within your team.

Have expectations of the “what” and the “how” changed since the employee left?

Your company may have grown or changed since the former employee left, and that means the expectations of your team have changed. The boomerang may have exceeded all expectations on deliverables and been beloved by everyone who knew them. But if the expectations are different or higher now, will they be able to deliver as effectively as before?

Communicate any different or higher expectations to the boomerang throughout the hiring process. They need to be able to determine if the role is right for them and whether they can be successful based on the changed expectations. Without this transparency, you won't be able to have a mutual understanding of what success looks like in the role.

Will I be able to provide opportunities that ensure retention long term?

As a hiring manager, it's your job to understand what's important to your employees (in other words, their values). If a former employee wants to come back, it's important to have an honest conversation about what they're looking for, why the role could be fulfilling for them, and what it will take to keep them engaged long term. For example, if the employee left to gain new skills, how will you ensure they can use those skills in this new role? What else do they want to learn, and can you provide that opportunity? If the employee left because of a lack of connection with their previous boss, will they be able to engage with you successfully? If they left for a higher title or more money, will they feel stifled again after a short period of time without a promotion or jump in salary? Without understanding the employee's values, it will be hard to provide opportunities that ensure long-term retention.

Boomerangs can provide great value to an organization based on their previous experience and the new perspectives and skills gained at another employer. It's up to managers to ensure the boomerang will be able to bring that value in the new role.

Marlo Lyons is a certified career coach and strategist, HR executive, and the author of *Wanted -> A New Career*.