



## THE ALTERNATIVE BOARD®

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### **Determining the Need for an Additional Employee**

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In a TAB Board meeting yesterday we were discussing how you know when it's time to add an employee. I recalled an old method I've used, and it occurs to me that it can also work in reverse if you need to trim the payroll.

I refer to these approaches as "See Spot run." techniques. They require no technology, merely some common sense and a willingness to include your employees in the decision-making process. (Do kids still read "Fun with Dick and Jane" in school? I doubt it.)

To create a new position, start by having the current employees list the duties of the new hire by the average number of hours weekly it takes to do each task. Instill a couple of ground rules:

1. Time allotted for a task must be one-to-one with current usage. That is, if it takes the current employee 5 hours to do something, assume the new employee will also take 5 hours. Of course there will be a ramp-up period, but this is not an opportunity for the current employee to impress you with how wonderful they are. ("I take 3 hours to do this, but it would take a lesser human being at *least* 15!")
2. If there are new tasks to be added; why? Demand that a profit value be added to each of the new duties. If we are going to process something faster, what financial benefit does faster processing bring?
3. Catching up is not a justification. If they are behind, why? Backlog issues should be addressed during slower cycles, with temporary help, or with productivity improvements, not by expanding the payroll.

4. What are the financial and operational risks of *not* hiring? Is there something that, if missed, will cost a lot of money or the loss of a major customer? Are things beginning to fray at the edges? Are necessary tasks going undone during vacations or sick leaves?

This is only the first half. Since we can assume the present employees will be offloading work onto the new staffer, what will they do with their new found time? Each employee who is experiencing "relief" needs to describe their new or expanded duties with the same 4 criteria that they used for the substitute.

Most importantly, help the employees focus on measurements of success for themselves and for the new hire. When they are legitimately overloaded, staffers tend to focus merely on getting help. Whatever happens, they only know they will have to do less than they are doing now.

Ask them to describe the most successful outcome they can think of. With this added help, will they be able to accomplish more? When it's time for the new employee's review, how would they score the highest level of success? What will this employee be doing if their wildest dreams came true?

This is difficult, especially for task-oriented staffers. If they wish to be included in decisions regarding major expenses, however, they need to show that they are capable of thinking through the issues and outcomes. Don't be afraid to tell them that.

I've found that many times the employees will come back with a half-position. They can justify 20 hours a week or so, but not a full time addition. Then you can reasonably discuss the options of part-time staff, job sharing with another department, or delaying the hire until there is more work.

For downsizing, the reverse works almost as well. Each employee describes their workload in detail; and you make the final decisions about reallocation. Of course, no employee will claim to be underutilized, so you have to read between the lines on their hourly allocation. In addition, employees get very nervous when there isn't enough work and they are asked to justify their existence, but they will do it. Expect a lot of detail, because this is their sales pitch to keeping their jobs.

The best result, whether you are adding or subtracting staff, is that one the decision is made, you have 80% of the new job description in your hands!

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