



R E C O U R S E S®

POSITION STATEMENT

Flubbing that First Big Hire with Agency Experience

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I've written and spoken extensively about how half of your hires need to take your firm further from their very first day. The easy test for that is whether you can picture them teaching an agency-wide seminar where everyone soaks up some insight.

But you can go too far with that concept, leaping so many rungs on the ladder all at once that you lose your footing. I'm talking about hiring far out ahead of your supply lines, making that first big hire, stretching with the compensation package, hoping to be in the big leagues now.

Here's why it's tricky to pull off:

- Your expectations are sky high and it's difficult to meet them. Any perceived lack of performance gets a magnifying glass and that new hire doesn't get much of a leash.
- They've come from an environment where they delegated to lots of other people and they just can't adapt to a smaller, more entrepreneurial firm where everybody makes their own photocopies.
- Their past performance stems from their connections and the surrounding cast, and neither of those come with the package. They are on their own and struggle to replicate the same performance.
- Teamwork is a challenge for them anyway, but they positively dismiss teamwork with what they might perceive as "B" players. They might be reluctant to share the spotlight.
- They see themselves as above the processes that you've worked hard to develop and spent personal capital enforcing. Timekeeping is a good example of that.

So those are some dangers to think about. They're worth thinking about, though, because hiring folks with great experience is often a risk worth taking. The biggest change I love to see from such hires is this one thing: they help you price your work with so much more confidence. They don't blink an eye asking for the money that you've wet your pants asking for in the past.

There are also some safer positions to reach up for: creative director, account planner, copywriter, and media director. The more problematic positions to reach for are business development, account service, and operations.

By the way, while that first hire doesn't typically work, the second does. Maybe because you learn so much from the first time around, primarily in setting your own expectations. I'm hoping this brief note can help you skip the mistakes that come with the first. Sort of like the guy that sits down at a cafe and asks about the price of coffee. "The first cup is \$1 but the second cup is free," and the guys says, "Well, I'll take the second cup, then."

Stretch, but stretch within reason. Otherwise the experiment will sour you on what otherwise could be a good idea.