Recruiting the Overqualified

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It's increasingly common to see a number of [overqualified candidates](https://hiring.monster.com/hr/hr-best-practices/recruiting-hiring-advice/acquiring-job-candidates/hiring-overqualified-candidates.aspx) apply for open positions. This can be overwhelming when you're simply looking to [find qualified candidates](https://hiring.monster.com/hr/hr-best-practices/recruiting-hiring-advice/attracting-job-candidates/resume-review.aspx). But some managers may be reluctant to hire the overqualified, either because they believe that they won't make good employees, or because they feel threatened by people who are more qualified than they are.  The bottom line: be sure your [recruitment strategy](http://hiring.monster.com/hr/hr-best-practices/recruiting-hiring-advice/strategic-workforce-planning/recruiting-strategy.aspx) will help you attract the great employees.

Monster Management Advisor Joanne Murray spoke with Monster about ways to overcome the reluctance to hire the overqualified candidate:

Monster: Overqualified candidates often have a stigma attached to them. Why?
Joanne Murray: This is one of a series of old rules that haven't applied for a very long time. Individuals used to be tainted if they'd been laid off, and now it's kind of a rite of passage. There was a whole set of reluctances that could be justified or warranted [back then], but in the current market, it's standard practice for overqualified people to apply.

What were the old rules? You mentioned that in the past there were concerns that might have been justifiable.
I think the old rules were that if you hired somebody that was overqualified, he or she will be dissatisfied, will leave quickly, will ask for a promotion before you're ready to give them one, will want more money and will be resentful and a problem employee. I really think it's a myth that people leave; I think people who go for positions for which they're overqualified, I don't think there are any data out there to suggest that they leave with any greater frequency than people who are normally qualified.

I think the new rules are that many people have taken a period of unemployment as a time to reflect on what's really important to them, and they may very well be applying for a job for which they're overqualified but that has really, truly been a better fit. But employers have to really mine for that, because it may just be that that's the only job there, but they don't really want it.

Does personality and fit then become more of a concern if you're dealing with an overqualified group of candidates?
Because the pools are so clearly competent and qualified, personality and fit -- although they've always been important -- are the basis of the decision nowadays. Because it isn't just a matter of "this person could do the job." It's "would I enjoy having this person, in this environment, doing this job with me? Can I manage to ride up on the elevator every day with her, or is she going to make me crazy?"

What if there is personal reluctance to hire someone who is overqualified and/or more qualified than they are?
I think it's an understandable concern, but it's a weakness. The strongest managers hire the most qualified people, and then foster an environment where they can just take off. If they can keep the broader goal of the overall accomplishments and performance of the department in mind, then they definitely want to have the most dynamic, talented team they can get.

But personal threat is a real consideration, because they also don't want somebody who's going to come in and show them up or jump over their head or in some way challenge their leadership. The pivotal moment for them is, is this because they're personally threatened, or is this a legitimate threat?

How do you determine if a candidate might be a legitimate threat?
One is you can directly talk to the person about it, and then gauge what kind of response you get. I would address the issue of being overqualified from the beginning and directly ask, "How is it that you're going to be able to live on $30,000 less a year? How is it that you're going to deal with not being decision maker and sometimes needing to implement decisions with which you strongly disagree, and do so cheerfully?"

The last thing I would say is that it's really important to trust your gut. In a world of overqualified candidates, companies have their choice, and they should never rush a search. They should always take the time to find the right person. People often move too quickly to hire people, and then they really regret it.