

## “Are Friendly Hires Friendly Fire?”

**Dear Stephen,**

How do you feel about friends hiring friends? I feel “friends” fall into two categories. To me, there are professional friends — people I would not have become friends with had I never met them through business or worked with previously — and then there are personal friends — people I might know from childhood, college or otherwise, who are not connected to the business I am in.

I am a regional VP for a major furniture manufacturer overseeing operations in six states. We have lots of sales openings. It’s become more difficult to recruit “in the box” candidates from competitors, which was our normal *modus operandi*. Everyone is busy making money and the good candidates do not seem to want to move. So, after months of back and forth, with

our HR department and my direct bosses, we are finally open to recruiting someone outside our industry, meaning someone already in sales, who hasn’t been selling furniture and doesn’t have industry relationships.

Essentially, we just want a good salesperson. As a hiring manager it gives me way more options and makes my job much easier. We have a great training program, which focuses on our products, and having the ability to train a worker from scratch is great. I don’t have to worry about someone new being concerned about existing accounts that the current sales people might have either. All of this should make my life easier, right?

My problem is that I mentioned the job openings to some friends, both in my personal and

professional circles. Everyone I know seems interested in coming to work for me. My personal friends think it’s glamorous to sell in the design/furniture and textile world. And then there are professional friends, who have worked for my competitors that are interested, too. I like all these people as friends, but know some of them well enough to know all of their issues, personal and otherwise. Some are polarizing, some are obnoxious, some have bigger egos than Rolodexes of a potential client. Basically, I like them when I see



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Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

## “If you find someone who can do the job, for heaven’s sake, hire them.”

*them at events, but do not want them as part of my team. I have a similar problem with my personal friends. I just don’t know if I can work with them.*

*Here I was all excited that I can hire people without direct experience and bring in people I know and like, and now I am suddenly hesitant. So what is the story? Am I wrong to avoid people I know? I guess I am worried that if it goes sour or if they don’t get the job, they will also blame me. I don’t want to lose friends over work. Do you think it is a good idea to hire people you know personally? What’s your take?*

Thanks,

**Friendly Hires?**

Dear Friendly Hires,

Conventional wisdom will tell you to stay away from hiring friends. I usually distrust conventional wisdom, and in this case I definitely disagree with it. Just from a business perspective, my experience is that people who hire friends or people they know have the

exact same rate of success and failure in finding good candidates as people who avoid it. So, as I see it, you can either hire a friend, who you think will do well in the role, or you can drag the search out for six months, maybe longer, and likely get the same caliber of employee. Seems like a no-brainer to me.

As someone who works to find qualified employees for a living, I can tell you it is not always that easy: If you find someone who can do the job, for heaven’s sake, hire them. If your company “tests” people, your decision should be even easier, because you have the test as an excuse if your friend doesn’t make the cut. This is a black-and-white deal, which allows you to remove yourself from the dirty parts of the hiring process and makes it easier to decide objectively. Make sense?

I understand it is not always so simple when we talk about hiring friends. And here we go back to the conventional wisdom that says business isn’t worth ruining friendships over. This is the same school

of thought that says under no circumstances should you date people at work and never become too friendly with your neighbors. I think it is all misguided nonsense that discounts that adult humans are generally reasonable and responsible. Yes, it is true, there is always a risk that hiring a friend can ruin the friendship, but, in my experience, that is rarely the case. The one exception is when you convince a friend to apply for a job and they don’t get it — I’ve seen this situation blow up once or twice. The simple solution is to not offer the job to someone you don’t want to work with. That is really the most important criteria — friend or not — can this candidate be good at this job? If the answer is yes, hire that person or tell them to apply. If the answer is no, don’t tell your friend about the position because you shouldn’t be hiring them. I know it is cliché, but any friendship that can be destroyed in this way doesn’t seem like one worth keeping — and it certainly isn’t a friendship that’s more important than your job.

**Stephen**