

9 Red Flags to Help You Avoid Making the Wrong Hiring Decision

By Scott Cullen

From questionable resumes to poor interview behavior, these common warning signs can help you separate strong candidates from future headaches.

When you've got an open position that's been sitting too long, pressure builds fast. Sales opportunities slip, service calls stack up, and your existing team starts to feel the strain. In that environment, it's easy to root for a candidate to work out instead of evaluating whether they actually will. That's where bad hires are born.

Most hiring mistakes aren't due to a lack of candidates; sometimes, they stem from ignoring warning signs that arise during the process. Red flags rarely hide. They're usually visible in interviews, references, or even early conversations. The problem is that urgency, optimism, or fatigue can make them easy to overlook.

If you want to avoid costly hiring missteps, you don't need a perfect process. You need the discipline to recognize when something doesn't feel right and the willingness to act.

Here are some of the most common red flags to watch for, especially in the office technology industry.

1. When the Resume Doesn't Match the Story

A strong resume gets a candidate in the door. But once the conversation starts, the details should align with the resume. If a candidate struggles to clearly explain their experience, responsibilities, or results, that's a problem. It may show up as vague answers, inconsistent timelines, or an inability to move beyond surface-level descriptions of their work.

In the office technology industry, specifics matter. A sales rep should be able to discuss quotas, average deal size, and how they built their pipeline. A technician should be able to explain what they've serviced, how they troubleshoot, and how they handle escalations.

When those details are missing or shift under light questioning, you're looking at a credibility issue.

2. Overly Polished or Rehearsed

Preparation is valuable, but there's a difference between being prepared and sounding scripted. If every answer feels rehearsed, generic, or disconnected from the role you're hiring for, you may not be hearing the real person. Candidates who rely too heavily on stock answers often struggle when the conversation shifts or delves deeper.

The risk here isn't just that they're nervous. It's that they've learned to interview well without necessarily being able to perform well.

A simple way to test this is to ask follow-up questions that require concrete examples, such as "Walk me through the last time that happened" or "What would your manager say about how you handled that?"

If the answers get thin quickly, pay attention.

Copier Careers is a recruiting firm dedicated exclusively to helping copier channel employers find experienced service techs, copier sales reps, managers, controllers, back office staff, and MPS/MNS experts. Learn more about our commitment to the industry at www.CopierCareers.com.

Copier Careers®

3. Blaming Everyone Else

You'll rarely meet a candidate who says, "I was the problem." But how they talk about past employers still reveals a lot.

If every previous job ended because of bad management, poor leadership, unrealistic expectations, or toxic environments, that's a pattern worth questioning. Even in genuinely difficult situations, strong candidates can usually reflect on what they learned or how they would do things differently.

In the office technology space, where long-term customer relationships and team collaboration are critical, a lack of accountability is a serious liability. A salesperson who blames marketing, service, or management for every missed target will likely bring that mindset into your organization. You don't need perfection. But you do need ownership.

4. Inconsistent Job History Without a Clear Reason

Frequent job changes aren't automatically a red flag. In some cases, they reflect industry shifts, acquisitions, or better opportunities. The issue arises when those moves don't add up.

If a candidate has a string of short tenures and can't clearly explain why, you're left guessing whether they were pushed out, underperformed, or simply struggled to adapt. That uncertainty is your risk.

This is especially important for roles that require ramp-up time, such as sales territories or technical positions tied to specific product lines. If someone hasn't stayed long enough to gain traction, you have to ask why. Sometimes the answer is valid. Sometimes it isn't. Your job is to find out which.

5. Weak or Vague References

References are often treated as a formality, but they can be among the most revealing parts of the process if you listen closely. Unfortunately, many Copier Career clients usually don't bother to call references. A strong reference doesn't just confirm employment; it provides context, examples, and enthusiasm. A weak one is often brief, cautious, and noncommittal.

Phrases such as "They did what was asked" or "We didn't have any major issues" are not endorsements. They signal that the reference is being careful with their wording.

Also, pay attention to what the candidate provides. If they avoid listing direct supervisors or list only peers, that can be telling. If you're not hearing clear, confident support, don't assume everything is fine. Dig deeper.

6. Lack of Curiosity About the Role

Strong candidates don't just answer questions; they ask them. If someone shows little interest in your company, your customers, or how the role fits into the bigger picture, that's a red flag. It suggests they may be more focused on getting a job than on getting this one.

Copier Careers®

In a competitive, relationship-driven industry, curiosity matters. Sales reps need to understand customer needs. Technicians need to stay current with evolving technology. Administrative and leadership roles require awareness of how the parts of the business interconnect.

A candidate who doesn't ask thoughtful questions during the interview is unlikely to become more engaged after they're hired.

7. Compensation Expectations That Don't Align

Compensation conversations can be uncomfortable, but avoiding them doesn't help. If a candidate's expectations are well above your range and there's no clear justification, you're setting yourself up for problems. Either you overpay to fill the role, or you bring on someone who quickly becomes dissatisfied.

The same goes in the other direction. If someone is willing to accept far less than the market rate, you should understand why. It could be a career transition or a sign that other employers passed on them for reasons you haven't uncovered yet. Alignment doesn't have to be perfect, but it does need to make sense.

8. Poor Communication During the Hiring Process

How a candidate behaves during the hiring process is often the best predictor of how they'll perform on the job. Late responses, missed calls, rescheduled interviews, and incomplete follow-ups are all signals. While occasional issues happen, patterns matter.

In the office technology industry, communication is critical. Sales reps manage ongoing client relationships, and service teams coordinate schedules and expectations. Internal roles rely on clear, timely information. If communication is already inconsistent before the hire, it's unlikely to improve afterward.

9. The "Something Feels Off" Factor

This one is harder to define but just as important. Sometimes a candidate checks all the boxes on paper. They have the experience, the skills, and even strong references. Yet something about the interaction doesn't sit right.

Maybe their answers feel slightly evasive. Maybe their enthusiasm doesn't align with the role. Perhaps the chemistry just isn't right. It's easy to dismiss that feeling as overthinking. But more often than not, it's your experience picking up subtle signals that don't fully align.

That doesn't mean you reject every candidate who isn't a perfect fit, but it does mean you pause, ask more questions, and ensure you're not overlooking anything important.

Copier Careers®

Slowing Down to Speed Up

One of the biggest mistakes hiring managers make is rationalizing red flags.

- “We really need someone.”
- “They’ll probably grow into the role.”
- “Let’s just give them a chance.”

Those decisions are understandable, but they’re costly. A bad hire doesn’t just fail quietly; he or she affects customers, disrupts teams, and often forces you to return to the hiring process sooner than expected.

The better approach is simple, even if it’s not always easy: when a red flag appears, take it seriously. Ask follow-up questions and seek additional perspectives. If the concerns don’t resolve, be willing to walk away. The short-term pain of leaving a position open is almost always less than the long-term cost of filling it with the wrong person.