Rehiring ex-employees? Beware these 6 common slip-ups

As the economy rebounds, you may be looking closely at ex-employees who departed on good terms. Rehiring can slash your job-search time and reduce (or eliminate) training and onboarding costs.

About 40% of employers expect to rehire workers this year, according to a survey by consulting firm OI Partners.

The problem: Poorly managed rehiring can result in reduced productivity and morale. Plus, you face the possibility of discrimination lawsuits from rejected internal applicants. Such outcomes can taint HR's reputation.

Here are six common rehiring mistakes:

1. Rehiring average performers. Some organizations re-employ competent but less-than-stellar workers to avoid lengthy and expensive job searches. Ask yourself: Would you rehire this candidate if the person were a first-time applicant and unknown to the organization? Test the open waters first.

2. Failure to thoroughly re-interview. Ask the following questions: Why did you leave our company? What would cause you to leave again? Why do you want to come back to this company instead of another organization? Why do you want to leave your current job?

3. Failure to check references. Organizations typically don't screen rehires as thoroughly as they do first-time applicants. But it's best to interview former references again. Conduct thorough talks with references at organizations that employed the candidate after he or she left your company.

4. Failure to communicate the reasons for rehiring. Tell employees why the organization hired a former employee. Explain the reasons one-on-one to internal applicants for the position. Clarity may prevent resentment and discrimination claims.

5. Failure to be specific about job duties. Organizations assume that returning employees know their job responsibilities and the organization. Spell out the job tasks—especially if anything has changed dramatically since they left.

6. Failure to monitor the progress of rehires. Many employers have a tendency to skip or delay job evaluations of all employees, and put former workers on the back burner. Conduct regularly scheduled reviews with rehires.

Bottom line: When rehiring, remember that people change and so do the needs of organizations.