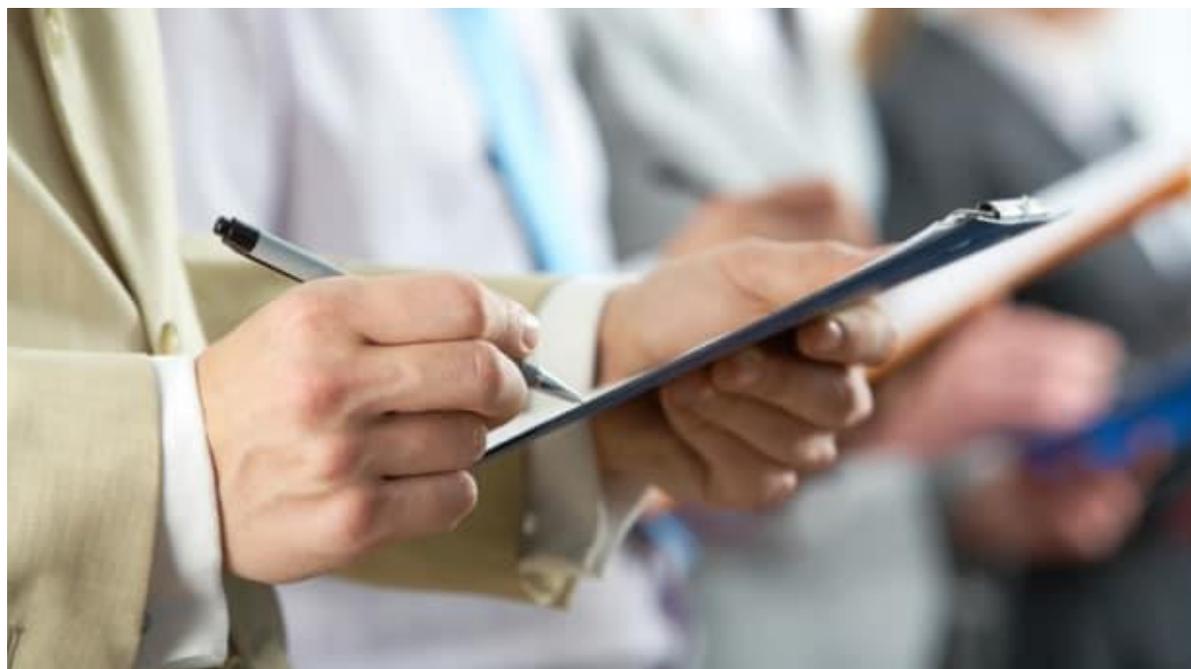


# Opinion: Duty of care starts with recruitment

(written for Devex)

By [Christine Williamson](#) @dutyofcareint 25 July 2017



*To ensure the foundation for duty of care is robust, having people in the right positions with the right competencies must be the starting point. Photo by: [Everypixel](#)*

The safety and security of humanitarian aid workers is arguably in greater jeopardy today than at any time in the history of the humanitarian endeavour. While our systems and practices have strengthened, the threat to the humanitarian worker has increased, particularly the local humanitarian. Staff are not immune to acts of violence and humanitarian workers are expected to negotiate their way through complex, insecure and sometimes unfamiliar situations in an often unstable and volatile environment. At the same time, NGOs must comply with minimum legal requirements for a healthy and safe work environment to ensure that they are not exposing their staff or the organization to unnecessary and avoidable risk. Avoiding the potentially catastrophic consequences of being found negligent requires an integrated, risk-based approach to security and people management.

## **NGOs must excel in attracting and retaining great people**

Duty of care is multifaceted. It requires a combination of different policies, practices and decision-makers to uphold key principles and standards at all stages of the employee cycle, from recruitment to exit. To ensure the foundation for duty of care is robust, having people in the right positions with the right competencies must be the starting point.

Complex environments require organizations to excel in their recruitment practices to find staff with specific competencies and experience. An organization should never underestimate the importance of the recruitment process and the risks associated

with hiring the wrong person. Placing the wrong person in a complex environment can be very costly and unproductive. Apart from the time and money spent on recruitment and selection — which has been averaged at 5,000 pounds (\$6,516) per recruit, according to [ACAS](#) — staff are likely to be unhappy and underperform. This has a direct impact on program implementation, the manager's time, team morale and even security. A great recruitment process, however, will attract the right people and enable organizations to determine whether prospective candidates are appropriate for the role. No matter the context, an organization can still excel with the process.

## **5 tips for excelling in recruitment and duty of care**

### **1. Learn from before**

Recruiting a new person is an opportunity for the manager to review the competencies for the role and the fit within the team. Learning from the leaving post-holder while focusing on the annual plan will help you excel in this transition. Ensure staff have channels of communication where they feel safe to raise concerns about their role and encourage this feedback. Conduct exit interviews and ask questions about health, safety and well-being — and if staff raise concerns about these issues, they must be taken seriously and managed appropriately. Build learning reviews into your normal work patterns but remember that collecting this information and ignoring it may be considered a breach of your duty of care.

### **2. Know the risks**

The health, safety and security of the post-holder is managed by assessing and mitigating the risks associated with the role and who will take these on. Support your higher risk roles through security management and enhanced health and well-being practices. Consider the post-holder's [gender, ethnicity, disability](#) or any other protected characteristic and whether this too will have an impact on their health and safety. Knowing the potential risks of the role for post-holders helps the manager know which competencies to assess in the recruitment process and how to continually support the individual when in post.

### **3. Do the basics well**

The recruitment process is full of administration and moving parts, and most processes are supported by legislation. Discrimination and data protection are two of the key areas where legislation must be interpreted into the organization's own policies and procedures. It can be very tempting to cut corners when under pressure or trying to speed up a process, especially when the demand for skills is high and the first round of recruitment has been unsuccessful.

Use good practice: ensure the job profile is concise (two-pages maximum) and includes competencies that can be assessed in the shortlisting and interview stages. Assess the health, safety and security competencies by asking candidates how they manage their own health and stress levels, what their understanding is of the risks associated with the role and informed consent. Verify references, conduct health and resilience assessments, ask about the candidate's own development needs for the role, and identify the minimum (and legal) standards you will meet before you recruit. [Do the basics well](#) and you are more likely to follow a fair and consistent process, and one that even the candidate may enjoy. One of these steps done

poorly or missed can mean hiring the wrong person. And remember, recruitment may be the first connection the candidate has with the organization, so ensure they are informed, treated fairly and have a good experience.

Make good decisions: plan for contingency and gaps in recruitment. Recruitment can take longer than planned and it's better to have a gap that can be covered by a current employee for a short time than hire the wrong person. Don't cut the wrong corners by lowering the standard of required competencies unless they are readily available in another team member.

#### **4. Immerse the manager**

The manager should be immersed and fully supported throughout all stages of the recruitment process. A good recruitment process will allow the manager to have the greatest influence on the decisions as they know who will fit best with the team and organization. Are your managers equipped and supported to make good recruitment decisions? Train and coach managers on risk assessing roles, writing job profiles, conducting shortlisting, interviewing, and using competency-based approaches and techniques that bring the best out in candidates. Help managers understand the full process and timeframe — do not drip feed a process — and they will then be in a better position to plan for contingency.

#### **5. Managing your duty of care**

There are three key areas where organizations should focus to ensure they have considered their duty of care responsibilities at each stage of the employee cycle. First, the systems, policies and practices that focus on the health, safety and well-being of employees must be robust — and these practices start with the recruitment process. Ensure your minimum standards in recruitment are clear and adhered to by all employees, and your risk mitigation measures have considered the risk of not finding the right people at the right time.

Ensure the health, safety and well-being practices are both internally and externally communicated, integrated, implemented, monitored and reviewed. Practices should never stand still; they should suit the organization's environment, be quality assured and adapt following any learning reviews.

Employees have the competencies to own and take responsibility for the governance and communication of health, safety and well-being practices. Duty of care is multidimensional and managed by multiple stakeholders and your duty of care practices can enable your employees to flourish even in the harshest of environments. A breach of duty of care is often traced back to a process or an area of support that was not well-managed or thought through — so your policies should be robust and managers must have the competencies to implement them.

#### **About the author**



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