



Fine-Tuning Talent Selection

How to Better Evaluate & Select the Right Employees

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It's often said that one of the most difficult tasks a manager has is letting someone go. While firing an employee is an emotional and awkward undertaking, hiring a new team member can be an even greater test of a manager's professional acumen.

Bringing in new team members is a weighty responsibility. The process involves a handful of objective measures, but is riddled with subjective information such as referrals, interviews and references. The cost of failure can be high, from the pricey possibility of rapid turnover to overworked, frustrated teams forced to compensate for poor hiring choices. An ever-present specter of failure hangs in the air when the final selection must be made. Will she be up to the task? Can he work with the rest of the team? Do enthusiasm and intelligence make up for a gap in experience? Couldn't there be a better candidate out there, somewhere?

As businesses today become aware of the expense and the value every hire brings to an organization, the importance of making good hiring decisions increases. To improve the quality of hires made, managers and business leaders must focus on fine-tuning the all-too-common but ever-so-critical interview process.

Start with the Interviewer

For too many businesses, the success of the hiring process is pinned on two unknown factors: the interviewing skills and preparation of the interviewer. Because interviewing is more art than science and more instinct than evidence, managers must be well prepared and well equipped in order to conduct successful interviews.

However, few managers and hiring authorities today are trained in interviewing techniques, making interviews more of a gamble than a strategic business process. In order to identify, select and hire exceptional talent, interviewers need to know how to turn an interview into an in-depth, substantial conversation.

One of the most effective tools for sparking rich, informative discussions with job candidates is behavioral interviewing.

What is Behavioral Interviewing?

The interviewer's job is less about matching skills to needs, which has already happened in the prescreening process, and more focused on exploring the professionalism and workplace competency of the individual. The interview must concentrate on past performance and experience, which is the purpose of behavioral interviewing.

Behavioral interviewing—often called situational interviewing—is a questioning technique that forces interviewees to give real-world examples of how they have handled specific events and challenges in the workplace. Rooted in the principle that past performance is the best indicator of future performance, behavioral questions focus on how something was done rather than the end results. For example, in a typical interview a candidate is asked to describe the duties of his or her previous jobs. In a behavioral question, a candidate will instead be asked to describe a recent work situation in which he or she overcame a difficult challenge. The focus is on the action taken, professional techniques employed and lessons learned. Give an example of a successful teamwork experience. Describe an important learning experience you have had in the workplace. These behavioral inquiries probe into workplace skills and behaviors the candidate has already demonstrated.

“The challenge for the interviewer is to throw candidates off the scripts they’ve rehearsed and get them to provide spontaneous, impulsive answers,” says Wayne Voris, vice president of Spherion® Professional Services. “By using behavioral questions, you pull candidates away from the comfortable facts in their resumes and zoom in on their personal workplace experiences. It’s the best way to get an unrehearsed look at the skills and personality of a potential candidate.”

Quality, Not Quantity

In all interviewing, the quality of the question is much more important than the amount of questions asked. Managers should take time to consider what they really want to know about an individual’s work style, experience, collaboration capabilities and past performance. Remember: just a few key behavioral questions can launch an interesting discussion of workplace scenarios and experiences.

On the other hand, too many non-behavioral interview questions (“What do you see as your strengths?” or “What are your long-term goals?”) can lead to stock answers that don’t probe deep enough into the candidate’s capabilities and compatibility. An interviewer should prepare a concise but balanced list of questions that explores performance, behavior, experience and accomplishments.

Prepare & Rehearse

A savvy interviewer will take the time to review the information available, such as the resume, referrals, testing scores and notes from previous interviewers. The more thought and preparation the interviewer puts into the interview, the greater the opportunity for gathering information that is relevant to the open job and helpful to the selection process.

Talk to the Team

When recruiting for a work group, a manager should also sit down with the team prior to the interview to gather insight into the day-to-day demands of the job. Team members and prospective colleagues offer rich job insights from the frontlines of the workplace. They can help identify the professional traits needed for a specific role and outline the challenges and benefits for a future hire. Managers not only get a better picture of the professional needed to fill a role, but also gain an understanding of the resource needs, goals and expectations of existing employees.

References & a Grain of Salt

While references are a good way to gather additional information about a potential hire, managers must keep in mind that the references provided are candidate selected and approved. A professional looking for a new career opportunity provides references that will give positive, persuasive recommendations. Therefore, hiring authorities must be clever and use references to their advantage.

Selecting New Technology Team Members

For organizations adding new members to existing IT teams, Spherion® technology recruitment experts have a few words of wisdom:

- *Take time to monitor the chemistry of the existing team and gain a strong understanding of the personality traits and communication styles that will blend well with established team members.*
- *Emphasize the importance of soft skills (such as communication, client service and time management skills) as you evaluate potential hires.*
- *Work to create balance by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of existing employees and identifying skill or experience gaps a new team member could fill.*

Rather than asking typical reference-check questions (“Was John Doe a diligent worker?” or “Did Jane Smith get to work on time regularly?”), managers need to do more of the talking. Explain the role and ask how and why the candidate would be a strong fit for the job. A carefully guided discussion with a reference can provide helpful insight into a candidate’s past and potential job performance.

From Great Interviews to Great Hires

In the end, it will always be people—HR staff, recruiters, hiring managers—who lead to the right hire. Supported by skills tests, referrals, academic standings and performance records, it is their interviewing skills, their instincts and finally, their ultimate decisions that determine who joins the company. By improving the pivotal interviewing process, a business energizes managers to take greater care in talent selection and to see greater value in every hire. The result for businesses that emphasize interviewing excellence is a stronger management team equipped and ready to build a stronger, better workforce.