

Growing Companies Must Utilize Solid Interviews

By **Jim Sirbasku**

The art of interviewing is and has always been highly overrated. Even when good questions are asked, they aren't always as tailored to the position as they could be. For example, most interviewers ask candidates applying for an accounting position about their previous employment histories. While the question is practical, there are more specific questions that help reveal more about whether a person is capable of delivering what an employer needs. In most companies, an accountant's position requires conscientious behavior and discourages those who exhibit spontaneity. To find out if a candidate has characteristics that are consistent with the type of behavior an employer requires, an interviewer might ask, "What have you done to overlook a policy or procedure that got in the way of reaching a goal?" Ideally, the answer will uncover how loosely the candidate may interpret rules. Similarly, if the position requires an organized individual versus a reactive one, an interviewer might ask, "What system do you use to ensure nothing is lost or overlooked?" Questions like these call for responses that speak volumes about a person's behavior.

What works, what doesn't

To do the best job possible, it's important for America's hiring professionals to challenge their current interview practices. This means looking closely at steps that lead up to final hiring decisions and estimating the degree to

which hiring decisions are riddled with personal biases. Keep in mind: the more scientific the interview, the less emotional decisions will direct the ensuing course of events.

Group interviews don't work. They're superficial and play out more like a game of tag. Also, selecting candidates based on first impressions tends to happen as a result of personal biases and will typically backfire. Recruiters' personal biases get in the way.

What does work is testing. To understand why, consider a brief chronology of tools used in the hiring process to date:

▪ **Interview:**

For far too long, the most important factor in the hiring decision was the interview. Yet, experience shows only a coincidental correlation between the ability to deliver well in an interview and to deliver well on the job. Studies have pegged this correlation at 14 percent, or one good employee out of every seven people hired. This number increases to 26 percent if candidates pass background checks.

▪ **Personality Characteristics Assessment:**

The first assessments used to improve the hiring process measured personality characteristics. This helped raise the rate of success in hiring to 38 percent.

▪ **Abilities Assessment:**

When applicants were assessed for abilities as well as personality, employers found they hired the right people approximately 54 percent of the time.

▪ **Interests Assessment:**

Becoming more sophisticated, interests assessment was added to the mix, which raised the bar to 66 percent.

▪ **Integrated Assessment:**

Most impressive to date, integrated assessments measure a combination of factors, as well as introduce the component of "job match." Cutting-edge technology combined with empirical data evaluate 'The Total Person' in a way that measures how much candidates match the employees who are exemplary in performing their duties. These assessments have increased an employer's ability to identify potentially excellent employees better than 75 percent of the time.

Mistakes to avoid along the way

One of the biggest mistakes in the interviewing process occurs when the interviewer sells the candidate on the position before

knowing if the candidate is even a fit. This approach, while common, is backwards. If the interviewer begins by telling the candidate everything about the position, then the candidate knows exactly what is necessary to ace the interview. When this happens, job candidates camouflage their personalities temporarily, making themselves look like the position being described.

While people can mask their true tendencies in the short run, barring some unforeseen miracle, personalities don't change significantly over the long term. Hiring professionals, trainers and managers cannot perform magic. Simply telling employees what is expected doesn't mean they know how to internalize those requests or strive to match their given profile. The result: too much time and money are invested in hiring and training the wrong people.

The mistake that occurs goes beyond hiring the wrong type of person. The real mistake comes from not attempting other options, such as moving the person into a more appropriate position within the company. When new hires put forth all their effort to try and make good impressions, it's more reasonable to reposition them internally than to terminate them altogether.

As the saying goes: "For every pot there is a cover." For every job function, there is a person who will perform it with excellence.

The payoff

Why is it there's never enough time to do a project right the first time, but there's always time to do it over? Hiring the right people means taking the time upfront to learn about the position being filled, what type of behavior it requires and what type of person will best fit the description. The time, energy and money invested in these additional steps create a more positive situation for everyone in the end.

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