

Competitive Fishing — The Employer’s Guide to Catching Better Employees

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When you go out in the marketplace to find a new employee, you are very much in the role of a tournament fisherman! You and all the other employers seeking a new recruit, standing around the shores of the same pond, all wishing you could catch a world-record fish...but, unfortunately, *that* fish does not live in *this* pond!

Your task, then, becomes one of catching the very best fish you can, not catching the little ones that you’ll eventually throw back, and certainly trying not to catch any bottom-feeding carp.

How, then, are we employers to compete? Like tournament fishermen, **we are likely to do much better if we know something about the fish available in our pond!** Anglers use fish finders to help see through the muddy water. How many big ones are available? How many little ones will hit our bait first? How many carp?

Where do the best ones swim—on top, or on the bottom? Many employers don’t have a very good picture of the answers to these important questions, and are forced to blindly throw their bait out in the form of shotgun advertising, hoping for the best.

Tournament anglers invest a lot of money in their tools—rods, reels, and lures designed to maximize their catch of the best fish, and minimize the time they waste on the others. As employers, **we will have the best return on our investment if we have good tools, helping maximize our catch.**

OK, enough of the fishing analogy—you get the idea. In learning about the characteristics of our applicant population, and in targeting the most desirable among them to transform into good employees, we need a competitive fisherman’s mindset, and tools that will allow us to measure the population and select the best from them. That tool, for many successful companies, is a quality pre-employment assessment.

Pre-employment assessments have been in use for well over 50 years, and are sometimes referred to as “honesty-integrity tests.” As with most products that have stayed on the market for 50+ years, the types and formats have evolved into a bewildering array of choices, some very good, some nearly worthless, or even illegal. How can you recognize a measure that is likely to be able to help, and also be sure it’s not going to cause you trouble?

You can look for several things that tend to identify a good pre-employment screening assessment:

- It will have **a legal opinion (in writing)** available to you on request. It will have a **technical manual**, also available on request, which will document the **reliability, validity, and non-discriminatory characteristics** of the instrument, based on valid scientific methods.
- It will include **a distortion, or “faking” score**, to alert you to invalid results.
- It will **measure more than one important dimension** of employee characteristics. (For example, common measurements include honesty, integrity, work ethic, reliability, and probability of substance abuse.)
- It will provide **an interview guide**, to enrich your interview while steering you clear of forbidden waters.
- It will provide **clear, easy-to-read results** that need little interpretation, and it will provide them quickly and easily.
- The system will include **built-in, easy to use statistical tools** that do not cost you extra money to use.

Once you have found a measure that meets those standards, you are prepared to ask for two more things:

- Examples of case studies, showing the use of the measure in real work settings, the effects, and a cost-benefit analysis.
- A chance to speak with other employers who are currently using the measure.

Having found your measure, decided to use it, what should you expect from your new "fishing tools"? Within a short time, you should begin to see a clearer picture of your applicant pool, both their shortcomings and their strengths. You should be able to, in a relatively short time, see and document improvements in turnover rates, tardiness, attendance, shrinkage, and on-the job injuries.

As our companies, jobs, settings and cultures vary, so will results of using a pre - employment screening measure. In a sample of 5 case studies, however, across 5 very different employment settings, **the average cost-benefit ratio was over 20:1.**