

Behavioral Interviewing

Resources for People in the People Business

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“People get hired for what they can do and fired for who they are.”

Employment turnover cost the U.S. economy approximately a trillion dollars per year. What is it costing your company? The estimated costs of a poor hire run from three to seven times a person’s salary. And these costs go beyond the salary, including management and training hours, dissatisfied customers, compromised processes and low morale.

Have you ever hired someone who wowed you in the interview, only to find later that they failed to achieve objectives, had poor follow-up skills, and compromised your company’s values? On the other hand, have you ever hired someone who is just a gem? They come in and hit the ground running, and everyone loves to work with them. The question is how to get more of the latter.

When you become aware of the costs associated with bad hires, you are one step ahead. Then, by choosing a solid system, obtaining thorough training, and changing how you hire, you can gear up to hire only the best.

Putting a systematic hiring process in place, holding people accountable, and identifying the core values required is the only way I know of to obtain more of the second example. With only four full-time people, my company has often knocked results out of the park. Many competitors need three to four more staff members to produce what we produce. This is due to my ability to say no to the wrong people, terminate early when I get duped, and refuse to compromise our core values and processes.

Knowing the core behaviors and values of the person you hire allows you to know who the employee will be on the job after the six-month “honeymoon” is over. This shortens ramp-up time, increases productivity, reduces turnover and decreases costs. When creating a behavioral-interviewing process, first ask, “What operating standards must be met for us to maintain our reputation, be profitable and deliver high-quality service?” Then define the key performance indicators: “What are the day-to-day activities or core functions that this person will need to fully engage in to achieve these objectives?” The managers and recruiter can then determine who this person needs to be and what the

mandatory walk-in skills and talents are.

The system Alliance HR Network used, which KeenHire™ developed, encompassed the four main categories of behavior and delved into the candidates' approaches to thinking and solving problems, modes of acting, styles of interacting and core motivations. If you have someone who is very money-motivated but does not have much commitment to service, does not build solid relationships, and does not really believe in your core values, you should worry about customer retention. What if you hire someone with lots of passion but no organizational or delegating skills? This person can mess up a two-car funeral. Or someone who is all about the quality but is not proactive in day-to-day activities? He will spend many hours making sure things are right, but won't work to prevent the wrong things from happening again.

The next step is to facilitate a conversation among the key decision-makers about the essential behaviors for success in this role. Watching the best performers on the job or having them behaviorally interviewed will often pull forth critical information. The biggest challenge I find is that once someone gets a glimpse of the power of this industrial-psychology model, they want someone who has every great trait under the sun. I have to remind them that there is no job someone that powerful would apply for — they either have their own company or are self-development gurus like Jack Canfield or Stephen Covey. I then coach them to pick only the most important traits. In the behavioral-interviewing and industrial-psychology industry, I have been told, the average selection is six to nine traits per role, and maybe 11 traits max at the most senior level. An understanding of each trait, and what complements and leads to other traits, can help shorten the list. For example, someone who has a strong desire to be the best will often develop a love for learning. Someone who loves to serve people may become a great developer of people.

Once you determine the most important traits, with at least one from each of the four main behavioral categories (thinking, acting, interacting and motivations), you are ready to choose which questions and answers best home in on your needs. Isolating the right traits, debating (the best critical thinking is done with three to five people with similar values but unique points of view), and developing a behavioral questionnaire takes about three hours the first time.

The good news is that a solid behavioral-interviewing system includes coaching tools to aid you in determining whether your candidates' answers indicate that they truly possess that trait.

At KeenHire, Talent Management we conduct behavioral interviewing because behaviors, more than experience, predict success. Experience is only one dimension of a candidate's profile, and very often is the least predictive of a

person's success. Another reason we conduct behavioral interviews is to save management's time; most companies spend 80% of their time trying to fix the bottom 20% of performers. This happens when managers are desperate to fill their open positions, and quality suffers. It is easier and more rewarding to practice behavior selection versus behavior modification. Additionally, the purpose of any staffing process is to identify who can successfully perform in a given role. We would rather hire slowly and fire quickly because hastily made hiring and promotion decisions often lead to big problems.

It seems like a lot of preliminary work, and it is.

The advantage is that integrating behavioral and competency based interviewing in your hiring process improves your ability to acquire & retain customers, maximizes your return on your human capital investments and impacts your company's ability to get more done with less people. Additionally, employing effective behavioral & competency based interviewing elevates your ability to put the right people, in the right jobs. This keen hiring process reduces turnover, improves morale and decreases performance management headaches. Lastly, when your Management gets really great at selecting talent utilizing a conscious-hiring process you create a team of people who are aligned with your company's Mission, Vision & Values. When people join your company for the right reasons, they have a stronger propensity to stay productive and engaged for the period of time you need them most.

Isn't your company's future gain worth the investment?