

Using Assessments in the Hiring Process

Resources for People in the People Business

email: info@keenhire.com
web: keenhire.com
1-888-533-6447
Copyright 2008 KeenHire™

By Margaret Graziano, CPC, CTS, CERS

The movement to utilize assessments or behavioral-based interviewing tools in the selection process is gaining momentum. Many of us have been affected by these tools and are unsure of how to respond to the candidate or the assessment when we see the results and they are not as favorable as we would have hoped. Before adopting an assessment, there are a few things to consider; one is ensuring that the tool is a validated hiring tool.

To be considered a legitimate hiring tool, a selection tool *must* be a validated instrument. Validation means several things:

- 1) **4/5th rule.** If 4/5ths of a protected class cannot pass this test, a benchmark must be conducted. In many cases mental acuity or IQ is not a valid parameter because of the discrimination argument. Companies with over 100 employees using the Wonderlic must have proof that people who fail in the role have a certain score and people who succeed have another score, or they need to add another nondiscriminatory selection tool to their hiring process.
- 2) **A variety of environments and roles.** To be considered an ethical/validated assessment, it must be widely used and validated among *enough* people — typically over 15,000. TriMetrix, Clues and Achiever are all validated, widely used assessments that measure mental acuity and competencies and have a distortion measurement.
- 3) **Process.** EEOC requires that assessments be used at the same stage in the hiring process for *all* candidates.
- 4) **Measuring tangible traits.** These include organizational skills, self-starter, mental acuity, logical thinking, accountability for others. The DiSC, to name one well-known brand, measures communication style, not competencies.

Determine the right assessment parameters:

- 1) **Selecting the tool and the outcomes.** Ultimately it is the hiring manager's responsibility to determine what right looks like — a recruiter cannot do this, nor can the internal HR department. If the benchmarks change for one, they must change for all, or you could be liable for discrimination.
- 2) **Benchmarking existing performers.** Assess 9 to 11 peak performers in a specific role. Some companies also benchmark

equal numbers of below-average and middle-of-the-road performers. When a company needs to hire peak, they use the peak benchmark, and when hiring average, they use the average benchmark.

- 3) **Comprehensive position-requirements benchmark.** This is often used when a company has had bad hiring experiences, or is hiring for a newly created position, is undergoing a corporate transformation, or is under new leadership. Typically, an outside facilitator leads this conversation, preferably with three key stakeholders. Once the benchmark is created (measurable accountabilities, core functions, competencies, etc.) and the criteria are prioritized, the stakeholders each create their vision of the ideal candidate. These three reports are the benchmark used to rank all candidates. The best assessment I have seen ranks 23 competencies, motivational values, work behaviors and trainability.
- 4) **Existing-incumbent benchmark.** An assessment of a successful incumbent can be used as a model for an ideal hire. Make sure what you are comparing is relevant to the job: e.g., good systems judgment is critical for a process engineer; influencing ability might not matter in a controller role. Also be aware that if the incumbent has been in this role six years or longer, he may have modified himself to fit the role.
- 5) **Sales roles.** Success Insights is an excellent tool that measures motivations. Keen has assessed well over 1,000 people in sales/recruiting (Hunter) roles, and 88% scored 105 or higher in being motivated by Utility (ROI) and Independence (Power). The other 12% scored above 100. We have also assessed highly successful Farmers, and 90% had a combined score of 107 in Utilitarian and Social — the love of money and desire to help people. This assessment is a good indicator, yet it is only one piece of the pie. It tells you how and why a person is motivated to sell, but not whether she can do the job, how fast she can pick up new things, or if he will actually do the work.
- 6) **Matching and submittals.** Candidates are compared to the validated benchmark before submittal to the hiring manager. If candidates score out of the acceptable performance range in areas *previously* deemed as deal breakers, their propensity for success might be impeded. It is then the hiring manager's decision. Of course, if a candidate is hired who lacks the basic competencies and behaviors required for optimal performance, the candidate needs to know up front about the uphill battle he is about to engage.

When you do accept a candidate who has less than you originally were intending on, keep in mind that there are certain traits that cannot really be affected by coaching: work ethic, initiative, motivation for money, etc. Most people are who they are, and only they can change it. Another area to look out for is mental acuity. If you have a department of peak

performers with high mental acuity, don't hire a person without this talent unless you are prepared to make job modifications. However, if everyone in the department is very bright, yet the job doesn't require it, it would be inappropriate to screen someone out on that basis.

Red Flags

Assessments that are not validated

Assessments given only to certain candidates (like a protected class)

Assessments given sporadically, or at different stages of the hiring process

Assessments that do not pass the 4/5th rule

Assessments that do not have a distortion-scoring system (where candidates can answer with fluff and inconsistency)

Assessments that are not relevant to the role

As the economy gets tighter, it gets tougher to stay competitive, and everyone needs to get more done with less. As companies brace for an impending leadership-talent shortage, they are well aware of the impact of a poor hire in that arena, and many of these companies are opting to assess and choose wisely. Managers, executives and HR professionals need to partner in making the hiring process a system for identifying the right people. Patching a leak with a flimsy cover is a temporary fix. It is essential to put the right people in the right job the first time and to build the succession plan one person at a time.