Hiring the Right People: Why Employers Stumble
by *Scott Brennan*

How do you choose between several qualified candidates for an open position? Anyone who hires people will eventually face this dilemma. Let's take a look at several common decision processes used by hiring managers, and the reasons they often fail.

Using the Group Interview

There is great value in the group interview to determine if a candidate will work well with your team. The group interview enables you to engage your team with the qualified candidates, so they can provide feedback on the finalists you are considering.

However, as the manager, you should never abdicate the decision making to your team. In the end, you will need to weigh their feedback along with the other inputs you have received. There are situations where the team interview will be the deciding factor, but your staff needs to be clear that you are not completely delegating your hiring responsibility to the group.

Relying Solely on a Job-Focused, Personality Aptitude Test

Whenever I've skipped the job-focused personality aptitude test or discarded the concerns brought to light by it, I've deeply regretted my decision. People are on their very best behavior during job interviews, so they can display desirable behaviors for a short time. Think about dating. It takes a few dates before you start seeing the true character of the other person.

A statistically validated and job-focused personality aptitude test

can be a critical component of your interview process. But, be cautious about using personality tests in the hiring process as many of the most common tests on the market are not intended for hiring purposes.

However, if you use personality profiles, use them to screen out candidates, not to choose between them. Once you find several candidates who have a satisfactory personality aptitude score for the open position, you face a decision between qualified candidates. Using the aptitude scores as your final selection criteria is to again delegate your management decision to a third party.

Depending on Your "Gut Feeling"

Whom do people usually choose if they're relying on their own feelings to choose between candidates? Here's a hint: Look in the mirror. People are naturally drawn to those who are most similar to themselves in life outlook, education, and personality. Someone similar to you may be able to do the job that you have available, but this is how people subtly discriminate against job applicants who are older, younger, or otherwise different from them—without ever having to admit it was a factor.

Think about this question before you use gut feeling as your selection criteria: "What characteristics are needed to successfully do the job that is available?" The answer to that question may be someone very different from you.

Successful Hiring Considers Character Strengths

So, how do hiring managers choose successfully? Find someone with the character strengths your team is missing. Martin Seligman, director of the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center, identified 24 character strengths that fall into six main "virtue" categories:

1 wisdom and knowledge
2 courage
3 love and humanity
4 justice

5 temperance
6 spirituality and transcendence.
Seligman explains in his book Flourish that these six virtues have been considered "good and desirable" by the vast majority of cultures throughout history, and that actively using these virtues at work leads to increased happiness, well-being, and success. Of the 24 top character strengths, he considers your five most highly developed character strengths your "signature strengths."
Using this strategy to choose between qualified candidates will bring to your team its "missing" or "least well represented" strengths. Your team will be well positioned for the complete spectrum of potential challenges that lie ahead.

Do you know the signature strengths of each of your existing staff members, or yourself? You can find your signature character strengths by taking this survey on the Seligman's website.

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