



# Hiring Can Be a lot Better

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**Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?**

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**W**hat's the current status of hiring situations? 46% of new hires will leave in 12 to 18 months; 47% of people are unhappy in their jobs; 32% of all workers are seriously looking for another job<sup>1</sup>. Answer this question: Over the past 12 months, how frequently have your hirings turned out to be disappointing (with people leaving before you expected, or you hoping the person would deliver more)? Even if your results are better than the national average of 47% discontentment, still, preventing one unnecessary staff turnover per year is bound to save you more than just one wasted salary.

## 1. A Good Start

Most managers start out appropriately by (i) defining the job, but without noting the temperament the job needs. (ii) The as is skillfully crafted, but does it state clearly what you don't need? Does it avoid conflicts of one requirement with another? (A patient person rarely is also a driver.) (iii) Then employers carefully vet the resumes. But are they taking advantage of current techniques that allow 80% of clearly not-right-for-you resumes to be eliminated in minutes. (iii) Managers work with associates to narrow candidates down to a shortlist but they rarely appreciate that asking the 'right' questions is often the most difficult part of the selection process. (iv) While conducting thorough interviews, and conferring with associates to make the final selection, do they know how to by-pass the seat-of-the-pants interview approach for a more rigorous live testing process?

## 2. Is Something Wrong?

Historically, companies end up with approximately as much hiring failure as success. Thus managers something put faith in: "We'll just have

to try harder next time". But you and I know that if you change nothing, your results cannot be expected to change. Let us answer the basic question of: "What is wrong?" with explanations:

- a. People put their faith solely in skills and work history when they should give equal weight to attitude.
- b. People trust their intuition when they shouldn't; managers need to work with more facts and logic than feelings. Those facts must be found.
- c. Most companies have no thorough way of testing and rejecting non-performers quickly enough.

## 3. The Basic Problems

Recent scientific evidence<sup>2</sup> confirms what we all know intuitively; and that is that the traditional hiring approach does not work reliably. Why? Because it has flaws:

**One:** The first flaw (2a above) is that most peo-

<sup>1</sup> Mercer's *What's Working* survey, New York, NY, 27 October 2011

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel prize for his observations of how human behavior consistently creates major societal errors



ple still do not realize that Attitude on the job can be MORE IMPORTANT than skills, yet we still focus on skills. For documented proof see reference 3 below.<sup>3</sup> To drum up your own 'proof' think about your current employees and how important their attitude has been at your work place. Skills are essential too, but that is a 'given'.

**Two:** The second flaw (2b above) stems from the realization that the dominant actions of humans are based on our intuition. Although 90% of the time our intuition is right, about 10% of the time<sup>4</sup> it is dead wrong. Scientific analyses show<sup>5</sup> that we cannot tell when the intuition is letting us down. IN FACT WE ARE ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED WE ARE RIGHT WHEN STATISTICALLY WE MUST BE WRONG, which affects our ability to predict future events, such as someone else's personality fitting in with our own team's.

#### 4. Solutions for the Problems

**One:** We do not suggest that you forget about skills. The reality is that, for most positions, of the 20 or 50 job applicants, many if not most, have the skills you need. That is, skills are not an issue – it is a given, just as much as breathing on the job is a given. Among those 50 candidates you will need to search for those few with the right attitude. Attitude is more precisely defined as temperament and temperament can be measured by psychological testing (psychometrics). But what do you test for? You test for what the job and the job situation need. For example a job where the employee will spend most time interacting with people (other employees, or customers or the public, etc.) a people-oriented temperament is required. If you hire someone without that temperament, not only will the job be executed poorly, the employee will become unhappy. Therefore the ad for the job must advertise the ONE temperamental

strength you need (and do not water the soup in the ad by publishing your wish list for superman).

**Two:** Eliminate as much of the intuition of your hiring processes and, especially, forget about your clever nose for talent. Stick to the facts. Set up some factual criteria. Don't meet any candidates at first (because as soon as you look at a person, your intuition switches on full strength and starts the process of letting you down – which, unfortunately, as we have referenced above, is statistically the most likely scenario). Look at resumes, yes. But ask questions via email (because phones invoke your emotions too); compare answers from among the applicants. About 80% of respondents will not answer your emails reducing your short list to 20%. (Do you want that 80% anyway if they are 'too busy' to answer your serious questions?)

**Three:** Create a one to three-day test for your best few candidates of something that is achievable and fair. (This takes care of option '2c' above.) Let the numbers do the talking.

There are other tricks too – but not enough space in this paper – all of which have the single goal of removing emotion from the process as much as possible.

Any baby steps you take in these two directions will improve your hiring results.

Good luck

Bill Caswell

<sup>3</sup> Caswell, W., *The Climb to Excellence*, General Store Publishing House, Renfrew ON, 2003

<sup>4</sup> These percentages are not exact but they are close enough to represent the true situation.

<sup>5</sup> Kanheman D., *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Doubleday Canada, Toronto ON, 2011