

How to 'PIC' the Right Candidate for Hire

By Jim Plotkin

July was the busiest month for retail hiring in more than five years, as 50,000 new jobs were added, according to the U.D. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. And as last year's holidays approached the pace got faster.

Reviewing resumes and conducting interviews consumes so much time, and the end perceptions are subjective evaluations that often fail to identify the best candidates. That's why many employers are turning to other tools for faster, better hiring diagnostics.

How many of you have hired a sales clerk with 10 years experience who interviewed well and had great references, but ended up being a horrible hire? Maybe she was too extroverted, assertive, unyielding, careless, unreliable or slow to learn. In any event, you would have been better off with someone who was less assertive but learned faster, tried harder and smiled a little more often.

Blain Gowing, the owner and CEO of Edmonton-Alberta based Swimwear Etc. Ltd., uses an aptitude assessment. "We have found these services invaluable as a supplement to our other interviewing processes and find that the testing seems to bring substantial clarity to the information we have already gathered on the candidate," Gowing says.

Swimwear Etc. gets help from employee assessments. "Working with Plotkin, we have developed job profile summaries for our store managers and district sales managers that reflect the characteristics we are looking for in a candidate in order for them to be successful with our company," Gowing says, adding, "I cannot imagine us making hiring decisions at the management level without this valuable tool."

Although it's a common mistake, companies often base their hiring decisions on skills alone, neglecting other important factors. In general, an employer should consider three variables with every job candidate to determine if the individual is a good fit:

**Personality + Integrity + Cognitive abilities =
Promising candidate**

That sounds simple, but what do these terms mean? How are these attributes measured? When someone says, "Joe has a great personality," does that mean he's well-rounded or that he has the social skills for the job?

Determining one's personality is a broad, inexact task. Certain personality types are definitely better for certain positions. Good salespeople are generally more extroverted. Good waiters and waitresses are generally very accom-

modating. Identifying people with the right personality traits will lead to better hires, but not all stores require the same type of sales person.

Measuring integrity helps you to find more conscientious employees who are less prone to counterproductive behavior. Just imagine having an entire crew of "good citizens," who can depend on each other to show up to work every day and work hard. That's half the battle in establishing a strong workforce.

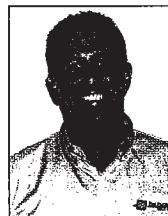
John Hambleton, owner and CEO of Fort Walton Beach-based IslandSurf says, "We have been using the Stanton profile for pre-employment purposes from The Plotkin Group since 1997. It has been a very useful tool in helping us weed out candidates with low scores in four areas: work motivation, adaptability, service orientation and trustworthiness. This tool has helped us hire a better caliber employee than we were hiring prior to implementing this assessment."

By automating the screening process with telephonic systems, scripted queries and Web-based tools, you can narrow the field of applicants more quickly and efficiently. You also get a better picture of each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. And finally, you are better able to analyze the results in the proper context, because what's best for one company isn't always right for another.

It's important to understand a candidates' cognitive abilities. How quickly can they learn? How strong are their analytical reasoning? For a mundane job with repetitive tasks, you don't need to set the bar as high.

But if you want someone who can be trained easily, learn a large product line and advance into higher positions you need to measure cognitive abilities - which you can't always determine from a transcript or a resume. There are many quick learners out there without a college degree or even a high school diploma, and there are some slow learners with glowing resumes.

Armed with this formula and the right kind of employee assessments, you'll gain valuable insights based on objective data. You'll be able to compare internal or external candidates on a level playing field, and you'll be much more likely to make good hires. †



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