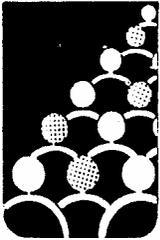


How To Hire The Best

Screening procedures simplify personnel decisions □ by Warren Bobrow



Hiring productive people for every position—from sewing machine operators to efficient top level decision-makers—is what makes a company

profitable. One avenue every company can follow to improve its human resources is pre-screening job applicants and candidates for promotion.

There is immense value in pre-screening applicants. Government studies show that on the average, your employees are worth twice their salary to your company. Studies also show that the best employees contribute 40% more to a company than the average employee. So, for example, selecting the best marker maker is worth at least \$16,000 a year in productivity increases, and even more when material savings are considered.

The more a person is worth to your company, the more important it is for you to select the best person possible.

Many companies have lax or nonexistent hiring procedures. Studies show that among a group of applicants, most employers will select a person who:

- makes a good first impression;
- is physically attractive;
- the interviewers perceive as being most like themselves.

Knowledge, skills, abilities and aptitudes of applicants often do not figure prominently in the interviewing process.

Also, in today's tight labor market, many companies believe that "a warm body is better than nobody," especially if a position has been vacant for several weeks. And because most companies do not want to over-pay a

mediocre employee, they only offer mediocre wages, benefits and training. What prevails is a self-fulfilling situation.

When a company knows it is getting an exceptional applicant, it can afford to offer better-than-average wages and benefits. Eventually, qualified job seekers approach such a company first because it has top people and because it can afford to treat employees well.

Hiring poor employees hurts profits. My studies have shown that losing a sewing machine operator after one week of employment can cost a company more than \$350. Keeping poor employees only costs more because many may never be successful in their position.

By developing a good selection system you turn away less desirable applicants and hire those who can contribute to your company's profitability.

Setting up sound selection practices. The first step is to establish a solid screening procedure. Begin with writing a job analysis. That involves taking inventory of the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that contribute to good job performance. For example, whereas a manager needs good logical skills, a mechanic must have good dexterity, and a secretary needs good grammatical skills. A job analysis differs from a job description in that a job description details the assignments and duties a person is responsible for.

The next step involves developing screening procedures to *measure* a candidate's knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics. Although various screening procedures exist, a written test is often best because of the number of skills and aptitudes that can be measured.

Many written tests now accurately

measure anything from error checking ability for filing clerks, to leadership aptitude for executives, to computer skills for billing clerks. Contact an industrial psychologist to obtain or to develop such tests.

When written tests are inappropriate, a work-sample test, such as a peg board test for sewing machine operators, is best.

Also, assessment centers are often used to assess managerial and executive candidates. In such a center, participants are graded on exercises like monitoring leaderless group discussions, making action plans with in-basket memos and role playing. The result is valuable information regarding one's organizational skills, ability to handle difficult problems and ability to work with other people.

Work-sample tests and written tests often can be used together. For instance, when hiring a marker maker, you would want to test a person's ability to visualize shapes, but you would also want a work-sample test to measure how well the candidate can operate a keyboard while looking at a computer screen.

Interviews. Although the interview is the most popular selection tool, research has shown that it is the worst predictor of job performance. The key to making the interview an effective screening tool is by making it more objective. To do that, apply the same rules to interviewing as you would to developing tests. That is, use the interview to gather information relevant to the job.

First, structure the interview by writing out initial questions and follow-up questions. Be sure the same questions are asked of all applicants. The goal is to have each candidate go through the same interview situation so you can accurately and objectively

compare performances.

Design the interview questions to elicit information relevant to the job. Do not ask for information that already is on the application. And don't forget to gather job-relevant information from employees already performing the job or from those who will be supervising the new person.

When designing questions, think about "good" and "bad" answers. By knowing what you are looking for, you will be able to score interviews objectively.

A second screening technique is the panel interview. Here, several people interview the candidate at one sitting. The panel should comprise those who will be directly working with or supervising the applicants, and it should reflect the gender and racial diversity of your company.

An advantage of the panel interview is that interviewers will hear and see applicant responses in the same situation. That provides a more objective analysis of the interview and it allows the interviewers to easily discuss the applicant's performance. Also, in a panel interview, fatigue does

not come into play as much as in successive interviews.

The panel interview allows an overall consensus *on* the candidate.

Each panel member should score the interview and the panel should come to a pass/fail consensus based upon interview scores.

A third way to improve interviews is to concentrate on the job-relevant information provided by the applicant. Many interviewers are biased against unattractive applicants or those who seem different. This is particularly true for applicants with physical disabilities. Your job is to select the person with the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the job well. Anything about the person which does not relate to performance of the job should be considered irrelevant.

Finally, interviewers tend to remember the first and last interviews better than those in between. This can be avoided by recording (on paper or on audio tape) the candidate's responses and reviewing them later.

Legal Issues. The Supreme Court recently decided that if an employer is using a screen which tests an

applicant's abilities relevant to the job the screening program is perfectly legal as long as the applicant's gender, race, creed, religion or national origin is not considered in the hiring decision.

But the Court also recently ruled that the same laws which apply to hiring outside applicants apply to promotions. Therefore, employers are required to exercise nondiscriminatory promotion and hiring practices.

Successful Interview Pointers.

- Pre-plan interview questions.
- Rate answers objectively.
- Score interview performance.
- Consider using panel interviews.
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