

Directions

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Since certain behaviors are difficult to train, could you do a better job of HIRING for them?

by Ellen Davis

The short answer is *YES, you can!* For one thing, you can improve your interviewing approach. For another, you can incorporate an assessment center. Here's a short summary of each of these improvements when selecting for those difficult behavioral skills.

Traditional interviews are about the WORST thing you can do!

Most of us are far too easily lulled into a discussion that yields little truly helpful data. Here are some instant improvement tips:

- Form an interview team and agree ahead on who will ask what questions. Consider having two interviewers for every interview rather than the normal 1-1. That way one of you takes notes or prompts for new information, while the other takes the lead in the interview.
- Predetermine the questions and ensure they will extract useful behavioral information. An example might be "Tell us about a time when you had a conflict with another person and how you handled it." Keep in mind that past behavior is a great predictor of future behavior!
- Ask every interviewee the same questions. Then you have more comparative information. Of course, follow-up questions and probing can vary by person.
- Bring the interview team together for a consensus meeting, preferably after all applicants have been interviewed. Hearing what other interviewers say can help surface patterns or relieve concerns.

Get them to SHOW what they would actually do, not just talk about it!

Although challenging to design, an Assessment Center approach lets you put the applicant into situations which mirror the job and see what they will actually do. This takes you a long leap forward from interviewing alone. Assessment Centers have been around since World War II, and we have had the opportunity to work on them recently at two large manufacturers in the US. Several important rules-of-the-road for selection assessment centers include:

- Determine the competencies through a valid job analysis, ensuring the assessed behaviors really are required to perform the role effectively.
- Employ multiple assessment techniques to elicit information regarding the behaviors you want to assess.
- Incorporate job-related simulations.
- Use multiple assessors who are trained to observe and evaluate candidates.
- Achieve consensus agreement among the assessors.

If you want to know more about the assessment centers we have conducted, we'll gladly help you contact our clients.

Lastly, when in doubt...

A few years ago, a successful plant manager, who is also a client and friend, advised a group of managers we were working with that her rule is simple: "When in doubt, keep them out." It sounds tough, but keep this in mind – an individual is putting his or her best foot forward during the application period. If what you are seeing then makes you uncomfortable, don't be reluctant to keep on looking.

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