

Want a Job? Enter the Countdown Lottery

I was amazed at the lead story in this week's NZ Herald – "Thousands Cue for 150 Jobs". Apparently about 2500 applicants were cued up on one day last week, with more the following day. The company closed applications at 3pm the second day so they can complete interviewing by 8pm!

The Countdown supermarket chain is opening a new store in South Auckland. Prospective employees are asked to line up for a chance to be interviewed for the 150 job openings. There are 40 interviewers and each person is given a one-on-one interview for 15 minutes. About 50% of the applicants are accepted to the interview stage.

This has to be the most insane recruiting process I have ever heard of, and I've heard a few! This is not about best practice employee selection, it's about the random effects of a lottery.

Would you cue for 7 hours for a 50% chance of getting an interview? And if you "won" that "prize" and get your interview, you then have about a 1 in 10 chance of scoring a job. The validity of Countdown's selection process is akin to a lottery for both the applicants AND the company.

For starters they are basing their initial cut (who gets to the 15 minute interview) by scanning CVs – can you imagine this process, reading through thousands of CVs, each one in a different format? About the best thing a CV can tell you is how good a writer the applicant is, or in most cases, someone else is!

Then there's the interview. Science tells us the validity of one-on-one unstructured interview is .05 to .15 – that means you'll get it "right" 1 in every 6 interviews. Now I am not too sure if the interviews are structured (all applicants receive the same questions), and if there are two (or more) interviewers per interview (I doubt it), but if this is the case, the odds jump to between .40 to .60 – much better odds, but still the toss of a coin.

I am constantly gobsmacked at the importance employers place in unstructured, one-on-one job interviews (the usual employment process). This form of interviewing is the most used employment tool, the most expensive (management time) and the least valid selection process.

The recruitment process Countdown is using seems to be a gross waste of management time, but more importantly, this investment will provide them with little valid information to ensure they don't employ "horror stories" – it's a lottery.

I would initially start this recruitment drive via an online simple application form, followed by a short mental ability/attitudes test (all in one 30 minute process). Even just a simple mental ability test would have selected out many who don't "fit" the roles. A mental ability test is the highest predictor of job performance – about .56. The company could have then selected down on

some really valid criteria – not only the knowledge, skill and experience to do the job (application form – can they do the job), but also the candidates' learning ability and personal attitudes (how will they do the job). Then proceeded to a simple background check followed by group or panel interviews on the finals.

Yes, I know the negative Nellie's are going to say some people don't have access to a computer – too bad. With about 2500 plus applicants the company is not worried about narrowing the field. And don't throw up the fairness argument. In today's world you can always access a computer somewhere and there are plenty of friends and family people who can help these people out. After all many of the jobs they are applying for may involve computer/checkout usage.

It's 2010! Hunting and getting a job without very basic computer and Internet skills is difficult at best and I hardly think it's in the realms of fairness for a company to totally accommodate applicants – I hardly think cueing for 7 hours constitutes accommodation or fairness.

And whilst talking about fairness, let me introduce "job fit" again. It is just as important for the employee, as it is the employer, to ensure the person is the right "fit" for the role. There is a job for every person, but not a lot of different jobs for each person.

Hiring individuals who don't "fit" the specific job role sets them up for failure and that's not the employee's fault; it's bad hiring processes by the employer. No wonder the Employment Authority is bursting at the seams.

Hire tough – manage easy!

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