

The Employment Interview – A Dreadful Predictor of Job Performance

I've sat in on a few interviews over the last 40 years – both as interviewer and interviewee. Couple this up with what science has taught me about the interview process and I think I can speak with some authority on the subject of employment interviews.

From my experience, I see two main types of interview. The first one is the “meet and greet”. Here, the hiring manager arranges to meet the prospective candidate for a general chit-chat. It's a free-wheeling conversation where decisions, from both parties, will be based on emotion – do we like each other?

This type of interview provides very little information to enable sound decision making. In fact, because they are usually conducted very early in the process, they are darn right dangerous.

As humans we are programmed to make quick decisions. In psychology we call this the “fight or flight” syndrome. We just don't have the luxury of time to research all our decision making, so we tend to “satisfice” – we look for the first sufficiently satisfactory solution – we take mental short-cuts.

With the “meet and greet” interview, the first five minutes is critical – particularly for the candidate. If they make a good impression, dress well, talk well, this possessiveness will put them in the driver's seat to get the position. And from the hiring manager's perspective, just because a candidate talks and presents well is no indication that they can do the job well!

The second form of interview is usually the “sell and tell”. Here, the hiring manager does all of talking upfront. Usually the contents are based on how wonderful the company is to work for, opportunities to progress, what the company requires in their people. After this stellar selling job, the manager then asks the candidate some questions. Bright candidates only need to “parrot” back answers based on information given first up to win the heart and mind of the manager. This type of interview is very common.

It is a scientific fact that the unstructured interview is absolutely useless in predicting job success. In fact thousands of psychological experiments tell us that the predictability is between .05 and .15. This means, at the very best, you have a one-in-six chance of getting it right. Pretty poor odds if you gambling with a \$50,000 annual salary!

Ok you say, what's the panacea? Well for a start, let's structure the interview. All candidates get the same questions based on the performance criteria for the job. Each question seeks concrete examples of past experience – past behaviour reflects future behaviour. Finally there needs to be two plus interviewers who “rate” replies to each question.

The structured interview will improve your odds. Science tells us our predictability will rise to .50. That's still the toss of a coin, 50% of the time you'll get it right.

One of the biggest impacts on interview outcomes is "candidate schooling". I Googled "How to ace a job interview" and got 646,000 hits – lots of videos too. When I did the same on Amazon, I got 40 books. Even with a structured, behaviourally based interview, candidates can still give you "book" answers.

Despite the fact that we are seeking actual workplace examples, most interviewees will try and give you opinions and, as we all know, it is very easy to give an opinion on just about anything.

Most of the managers I speak to think the interview is the least expensive part of the selection process. Reality tells us interviews are the most expensive when weighed up against the cost of management time versus the results - and very, very expensive due to the risk of making a poor hiring decision. Given the abysmal predictability and expense of interviews, its amazing how they are the most used and most relied upon tool for hiring.

This confirms my suspicions; there are a tremendous number of managers out there who think they can read minds. These managers and Sales Managers are the biggest culprits; think they can "pick 'em when they see 'em". If this is the case, how come their organizations are not bursting at the seams with star performers and turnover is zero? These managers would make more money doing tarot card readings!

Yes, you do need the interview, but structure it and do it at the back of the selection process. Prior to this, use unbiased tools to filter out the "turkeys" so only the "eagles" make the final interview hurdle.

We suggest, a structured application form; forget CVs, these will only tell you how good a writer they are, or somebody else is, and contain only the information the candidate wants you to know. After selecting out those that don't have the knowledge, skill and experience to do the job, put the remainder through a validated employee profiling assessment. We recommend [PeopleCLUES](#) or [Prevue](#). Followed by reference/background checking, a brief (4 questions) telephone interview and then the main structured interview should be applied.

Need help? Check out our [recruitment kits](#). Our simple online [recruitment management system](#) will automate your filtering – by using application forms and uploading CV, telling you if they CAN do the job. All applicants also complete our online employment profiling assessments, measuring personality, cognitive ability, values, motives and attitudes. This tells you HOW and WHY they will do the job – this innate behaviour is impossible to glean from any interview process.

Most managers will hire on the CAN, but will always have problems, or terminations based on the HOWs and WHYs.

