

What You See Is Not What You Always Get

Hiring Managers that are seeking to avoid hiring another “horror story” are increasingly turning to pre-employment testing to improve their decision making. The trouble is, many of these managers are blindly interpreting the results and drawing conclusions that are often based on their own schemas. This is very common when managers enter into the “psychometric world” for the first time.

Usually the manager has made the decision to hire, has heard about pre-employment testing and has decided to put a toe in the water to test their chosen one as a final check. This is usually a gross waste of money and time – why?

Well, if the results look good, the manager will feel pleased that it confirms their gut feel – I can pick them when I see them. But, if the results are waving some big red flags, these will be ignored (we can manage our way around these), or the manager can't turn back at this late stage as the person has been basically employed!

I had a classic example come to my attention last week. Four months ago, I tested a candidate for a temporary managerial position (the owner was going on a 3 months holiday). If the manager worked out, there would be an opportunity to move deeper into the business.

The test results were dreadful. I told the business owner, in my typical straight forward manner – This person is a disaster, do not hire; he will damage your business. My advice was not heeded as the holiday was looming and the candidate “seemed” ok. I diarised to touch base six months later.

Yesterday I got this email. “Unfortunately, he was no good, we had to let him go. He wasn't dishonest, we just had very different opinions and he wasn't respectful of our direction, plus we had a lot of complaints from our patients”

In most cases, pre-employment tests are much better predictors of candidates who won't fit the job rather than a blueprint for those that will. The above scenario was a great example. This candidate score poorly in three critical areas:

A very low conscientious score – hundreds of scientific studies confirm that people with very low conscientious scores rarely deliver adequate work performance.

A very low general abilities score – If you could do just one test, a general mental abilities test will give you the strongest prediction that the said candidate will not “fit” the role. Let's face it, people that are poor problem solvers and slow learners struggle to perform in many roles (especially in the role from the example above).

And finally, the attitudes test highlighted a positive attitude to drug and alcohol usage.

Go figure – pretty clear results. However, the manager chose to only accept the positive results. These were a highly sociable, out-going demeanor and emotionally stable characteristics – sociopaths also exhibit these behaviours!

The big point I am trying to make here is, never accept a pre-employment test on face value. Even if the benchmark scores are over 80% there may be one or two characteristics working in concert that wave a red flag.

In short, I always drive home to our clients that assessments are very good at helping you identify the poor performers or those with bad attitude, but not so good at highlighting the stars.

Whenever you get delivered a psychometric report, always call for verbal feedback; its part of our service. We are not emotionally involved with the candidate interactions and can help you see through the rose-tinted glasses to highlight areas of weakness you need to be aware of and probe for in the main interview and in background checking.

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