

In This Issue: 3 Reasons Not To Trust Your “Gut” Interview Impression Of An Applicant

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Tools, Tips, & Techniques for Avoiding
Hiring Mistakes and Developing People
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3 Reasons Not To Trust Your “Gut” Interview Impression Of An Applicant

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The interview is the most frequently used pre-employment evaluation tool, but it is in many ways the least reliable.

Most people use the interview with the intention of determining how suitable an applicant is for a job. It is often the basis for a prediction of how well the applicant will perform of he or she were to be hired. But here is a tough question that is not asked often enough: Just how effective is the interview at determining future job performance?

This is a question that makes industrial psychologist’s cocks run up and down because it gives them the excuse to do something useful. Every forty years or so, they get busy and do a study that looks at the effectiveness of the interview at predicting job performance.

Typically, these studies are very well done – which means they cost a lot of money – with thousands of participants, detailed performance appraisals, and mounds of computer printouts.

The results consistently and depressingly report the same finding: interviews don’t predict future job performance very well at all. And there are three main reasons for this.

1. The applicant usually wants the job. As a result, he or she is on best behavior. Not

typical behavior, not what you can expect to see day-to-day after the “honeymoon” period of the new-hire is over, but put-your-best-foot-forward, laugh-at-the-interviewer’s-jokes, admire-the-pictures-of-his-kids behavior. As a result, what you see in the interview will be different to some extent from what you see on the job.

2. Preparation materials, such as “How to Beat the Interview” books, are everywhere. While most applicants devote a fair amount of time to learning how to present themselves well in the interview, most interviewers are not so well prepared. Many interviewers assume the process of interviewing is like riding a bike: you just get out there and do it. This means that the applicant that has prepared for the interview often has the advantage.

3. Interviewing is an art form, not a science. Like most art forms, there is a natural range of talent among the people who practice it. Just as there are a few great painters and a lot of ho-hum ones, there are some individuals who just have a talent for interviewing. As with painting, a lack of natural talent at interviewing can be offset, to some degree, by lots of hard work, practice and study. But how many people who interview as part of their job invest time in learning how to be a more effective interviewer?

If you happen to be one of those people blessed with an abundance of interviewing talent, please call me. I can always use a few good tips. On the other hand, if you are like most of the rest of us, here are some ways to improve your interviewing “hit rate.”

1. Don’t talk so much in the interview. There is a natural tendency to want to put the interviewee at ease (and maybe ease your own anxiety) by launching into a history of the company, the industry, the position, etc. Don’t give in to this tendency. The purpose of the interview is to learn about the applicant. Let him or her do the majority of the talking.

2. Ask open-ended questions. Avoid questions that can be answered with a “Yes” or “No.” At best, such questions give you little insight into the applicant and, at worst, point him or her in the direction of how to butter you up.

3. Be as alert to how he or she answers questions as you are to exactly what he or she says. For example, watch body language, choice of words, and hesitations. If the way a person acts varies greatly from what he or she is saying, it may be an indication that the person is trying to answer with what he or she assumes you want to hear, rather than what he or she actually believes.

4. Watch for consistency. There should be a consistency in the applicant’s responses that provides you with a sense of completeness about the applicant. Any inconsistencies, whether logical or intuitive, should be followed up on. For example, at one point in the interview, the applicant may say that he really likes managing people, and at another point say that he dislikes subordinates who disagree with him. Since disagreements are a natural and common occurrence in management teams, you should ask more questions to find out how he handles disagreements when they occur.

5. Last, but not least, rely heavily on objective data to offset the natural subjectivity of the

interview. Background checks, reference checks, and psychological tests all offer objective data that is usually more reliable than the subjective impressions obtained in the interview.

Try these suggestions out, and I hope it helps improve the quality of your interviews!

Remember, People ARE your most important asset!

To Hire the Best, Test!

To Reveal Management Potential, Test!

To Diagnose Problem Behavior, Test!

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