

“Real Work” Interviews

A Tool for Making Better Hiring Decisions

By Carolyn B. Thompson

What did Jesus do to choose the right person for the job? It should be easy enough to figure out—watch what he did, learn how to do it, and then, do it. Unfortunately, in my first analysis, all I saw Jesus doing was walking up to people, saying, “Follow me, and I’ll make you fishers of men.” That didn’t appear very useful.

As a human resource professional, I needed to know why he chose certain people and what he wanted them to do. What were the how-to steps? My problem has always been trying to figure this out on my own, but when I asked God for help, these steps literally jumped off the pages:

- Jesus prayed, asking his Father for guidance.

- Jesus knew exactly what he needed people to do before he began the search—he wanted them to leave everything behind and go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything he commanded them to do (see Matthew 28:19-20).

- He observed people at work—instead of choosing them after only a verbal interview—assessing them more by

what they did than by what they said—“So why do you call me ‘Lord,’ when you won’t obey me?” (Luke 6:46, NLT).

- He told them exactly what he needed them to do.

These insights were a major breakthrough in my thinking. Previously, I was doing only one of the four things Jesus did. I knew exactly what the person needed to do, because the skills, attitudes and knowledge required were painstakingly researched and written down. And as a last resort I’d pray, but only when things became so desperate I didn’t know what else to do.

A Job Assessment Case Study

At St. Joseph Hospital in Bellingham, Wash., the HR department worked together with the employees closest to the work to create an assessment of a person’s ability to do the job. They set up a process, including a review of paperwork samples from the job candidate that was similar to what would be done in this job, an in-depth panel interview with all the people who’d be working closely with this person, and a simulation job trial that involved handling paperwork, dealing with phone calls, participating in a staff meeting and other work simulations related to the job tasks.

During each of these tasks, the person was observed, assessing his or her skills, attitudes and abilities according to the job description. It revealed the ability to make decisions, handle conflict, set priorities and communicate effectively, as well as how well the person performed the technical aspects of the job.

Instead of observing people at work, I was just choosing them based on verbal interviews. Applicants would be interviewed thoroughly by two managers and two co-workers, following a script. It was so perfect that even though applicants had become increasingly adept at giving the right answers or showing their best side in an interview, we knew just what to look for.

It was that step where Jesus observed them at work that led me to a better way. I then discovered this method was already being used by numerous organizations of all sizes and from all industries.

Observe Candidates Doing Real Work

One of the best ways to deter-



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mine qualifications is to observe candidates doing the real work of the job being considered. However, most state laws make it clear you must pay people for any work performed that would have been done by a paid employee, even in a job assessment role. This may not be an issue for people on your payroll, especially if you keep the assessment to a half day of doing the work of another job.

If you're assessing outsiders, you'll need to pay them even if it's only for a half day. In most organizations, the only reasonable way to do that is to put them on the payroll, and this involves other laws, such as unemployment, workers' compensation, etc., depending on how long they're on the payroll.

When you consider the cost in

for guidance.

Next, you'll need to *train the staff members* who'll be assessing the candidate through observation and evaluation techniques. (Because many employers currently have their managers doing verbal interviews without training, this will be a step toward better assessments!)

Stop again, and pray for guidance.

Finally, *choose a variety of methods and tools* you'll use in setting up a job trial. And be sure to choose tasks most people are physically capable of handling. Skip the lifting of 50-pound boxes for now. If the job requires it, you'll need to know it, but it's better to ask one of their references, and then let the post-hiring physical determine their physical capa-

information about their ability to perform, because we all see things from the point of view of the work being done. Job trials further cut down on hiring mistakes because candidates also get a better picture of what the job is all about.

Mistakes in choosing an employee can result in higher recruitment costs, unqualified employees, accusations of discrimination in hiring, wrongful discharge suits—as well as poor morale, lower productivity and costly mistakes.

Getting Started

Kevin Leman and William Pentak, in their book, *The Way of the Shepherd*, tell us when choosing sheep or people to use the acronym S-H-A-P-E to make sure you're choosing the right ones (see the sidebar "S-H-A-P-E Reveals a Good Fit"). S-H-A-P-E is a great model for a job description, *determining exactly what you'll need the person to do in this job*.

The most accurate job descriptions are done jointly by the person in the job (before he or she leaves), people who interact with that job and the supervisor. Have them make a list of every task they do from start to finish each day, along with the specific results expected for each. Then list the Strengths, Heart, Attitude, Personality and Experiences needed for each task.

It's best to prepare the list while doing the job, or watching it being performed. You'll miss things if you try to create the list apart from the actual performance of the job—most of us do too many things on autopilot to remember them all.

Now, take all the S-H-A-P-E lists from your team of assessors and combine them, looking for inconsistencies. Ask questions for clarification and write a clear job description.

Armed with that job description, you can easily choose the methods that will most accurately allow you to identify

Tools for Predicting Job Performance

- Have candidate provide writing samples
- Make reference calls, seeking specifics about job performance as it relates to the job description.
- Conduct job trials, using real work or simulation.
- Test candidate for aptitude, interests and needs.
- Prepare behavioral questions to be addressed in a personal interview.
- Have candidate watch video simulation of certain tasks and provide ideas for improvement.
- Have candidate participate in role play and give feedback.
- Present a case study, asking candidate to provide the necessary steps to complete the task.
- Setup individual interviews for candidate with employees with whom he or she will interact.
- Arrange a field trip to see specific things related to the job where candidate is encouraged to share ideas and ask questions.

choosing the wrong person for the job, paying a few dollars to get the benefit of seeing if your candidate can really do the work, or at least a portion of it, may be worth it. But let me suggest another way to handle this. To avoid paying candidates, set up a simulation job trial—work that will never benefit your organization.

The Steps

Whether your opening lends itself to a "real work" or "simulation" job trial, your first step is to *determine exactly what you'll need the person to do*. Prepare a thorough job description, making sure you're actually assessing applicants on their ability to perform the job at the level required.

This is a good place to stop and pray

bilities. Likewise, if the job requires the ability to answer questions from others, you'll definitely want to include a verbal interview.

Once again, stop and pray for guidance. (Are you getting the idea?)

In the job trial process you'll involve many staff. Though this makes it more difficult to come to consensus, once a decision is made the staff will support it, since it's theirs.

The training required to observe, assess and decide requires time and energy, but the staff will gain valuable skills in the process that will help them in their own jobs.

Also, using several people—especially when you add coworkers or team members—to assess and choose candidates provides a more comprehensive base of

the best candidates (see “Tools for Predicting Job Performance”). Finally, use the job description during the assessment as a form to take notes on the person’s match to each of the job’s tasks and S-H-A-P-E.

Ultimately, we need to trust in the Lord to guide us through the process. And that’s where the praying comes in again. Mistakes in choosing an employee can result in higher recruitment costs, unqualified employees, accusa-

tions of discrimination in hiring, wrongful discharge suits—as well as poor morale, lower productivity and costly mistakes.

Instead, I suggest following Jesus’ example in choosing your staff.

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ance through training. She has written several books, including *Interviewing Techniques for Managers*. You may email her at cbt@trainingsys.com, or visit www.trainingsys.com.



S-H-A-P-E Reveals a Good Fit

As a manager, you need to make sure the people you hire are a good fit for the organization and the position they’re being considered for. You’ll also want to make sure your present employees fit their positions well, too.

Strengths reflect their abilities. Make sure they have the skill set needed to do the job. They can learn some skills on the job, but they’ll need others the day they start.

Heart reveals their passion. It doesn’t matter how strong they are in a given area if they’re not motivated to exercise that strength. Their passion will reveal their motivated area of service.

Attitude shows a can-do spirit. People with a good attitude are usually team players and have a teachable spirit. People with a negative attitude tend to be “lone rangers.” You can’t teach them a thing. They complain a lot and always tend to think the grass is greener on the other side.

Personality determines how we’re wired: extrovert or introvert; love repetition or require variety; want structure or thrive on change; like lots of people contact or would rather work alone. The position must match the personality.

Experiences give us insight into how to handle various situations and a unique ability to deal with certain challenges.

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