BEHAVIORAL HIRING:

Round Peg, Round Hole…What a Novel Idea!

Little David loved his new pegboard. He particularly loved forcing that square peg into the round hole. Sure it was difficult, but with a little effort (and the help of Dad's shoe) he eventually got that thing to "cooperate." The only problem was by the time he finished, the square peg was bent out of shape, the round hole didn't look too good, and let's not even mention Dad's shoe! In the end, the toy was not very effective for teaching David his shapes.

To adults, the right solution is obvious—put the square peg into the square hole. Or, sift through the Legos and tinker toys and find the round peg. There's no reason to destroy the toy. Yet, in the real world it seems that many people have not really learned this lesson.

Take hiring for example. Companies continue to "force" people into positions they just weren't cut out for. The result: employees get all bent out of shape, and your company isn't as effective as it could be. And when it comes to hiring, the solution is nearly as simple.

Put the right person in the right position.

Savvy companies employ a technique to help them ensure the right fit. It's called "behavioral hiring." It's a process that assists hiring managers select people who are behaviorally suited for a particular position by analyzing both the position and the individual. Unlike traditional interviews which tend to rely far too much on a simple job description, behavioral hiring offers a more objective means to determine if a person has the right skills and personality traits to succeed in a certain job.

BEHAVIORAL HIRING CONCEPTS

Determine the shape of the hole.

Never start hiring unless you clearly understand the demands of the job opening. And this means knowing more than just the major duties. Typically, job descriptions include the "hard skills"—things such as experience, education, training, and a list of responsibilities. However, when using behavioral hiring, defining the hard skills is just the beginning.

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A complete job description must also include a list of the behavioral traits necessary to succeed in the position. After all, many people may have the physical ability to perform a job, but lack the proper personality style and traits to do it, do it well, and be happy doing it.

People *are* their behaviors, and no amount of training will change this. Unfortunately, however, many companies waste precious time, money, and energy trying to "make" their employees fit positions they are simply not behaviorally suited for. Instead, companies should be determining how to put the skills and traits of each employee to use, maximizing their full potential.

To determine the traits required for a position, try benchmarking. Examine your top employees in the position (or a similar one), and rank the observed traits in order of importance—some will be essential for success while others will just be desired.

Find the right peg.

Most commonly, managers focus on locating candidates with the right skills and experience. However, this technique ignores the most powerful (and overlooked) determinant of on the job success—behaviors. It is critical to consider what traits the job requires, not necessarily the traits you, as a hiring manager, enjoy. Many managers fall victim to the "Halo Effect"—hiring people they like, or those who have similar characteristics and interests. Using this method, you may find a "buddy," but you're not minimizing the risk involved with hiring.

In a behavioral hiring process, special testing and interviewing techniques are used to uncover

personality characteristics and behaviors. Each candidate's traits are then compared against the desired profile. Rarely will you find a perfect match, but by understanding the relative importance of each trait, you can find the person who offers the best fit.

We are all asked to "stretch" in our jobs from time to time—perform responsibilities we are not well suited for. However, if an employee is constantly stretching, and infrequently participating in tasks that suit his or her characteristics, that employee will eventually break. Simply put, behavioral incompatibility is the most overlooked reason for job dissatisfaction and employee turnover.

So where do you start? Assess the hard skills first. Then, once qualified candidates are identified, soft skills are studied to validate the person's willingness to do the job. Here are some of the techniques used for traits analysis:

Visual Observation

The moment a candidate walks in your door, they're exhibiting their personality. Ask co-workers for feedback and note their observations. Is the candidate outgoing or shy? Does she appear to be organized? How well does she relate to those with whom she comes into contact? If the characteristics your co-workers' observed contradicts those that the candidate claims to possess, "yellow flag" the candidate. And don't forget to ask your receptionist about the candidate. Sometimes the receptionist sees a whole different side of a person.

Personality Tests

Many good personality tests have been developed to evaluate behavioral traits. But be aware, personality tests don't produce answers; they produce a profile of leading indicators about someone. Once you've tested an individual, use the profile to supplement or confirm what you learned through your personal observations.

Also, it's not a bad idea to have a candidate fill out an "interest analysis." Discovering the types of activities someone partakes in off-the-job is a window into how they might perform on-the-job.

Behavioral Interviewing

Develop a structured set of interview questions that ask people about past behaviors. Ask candidates to describe, in detail, specific situations which exhibit the traits you're seeking. Watch out for the "professional interviewers"—people who can expertly discuss theories, but can't point to specific, personal examples. If the interviewee is unable to think of an example for a certain trait, it probably indicates that he or she does not possess it. Be sure to probe for details—ask the interviewee how he or she felt and reacted in the given situation. If someone naturally possesses a particular trait, they'll easily and clearly describe past situations.

Test for Desired Characteristics

Organizations often develop skills tests for candidates, so why not for personality traits? For example, if a position requires that someone be organized and have the ability to handle multiple functions, create an "in-box" test that requires the candidate to sift through a "days work" of material and determine which tasks should be tackled first. Similarly, if the position requires the employee to be assertive, yet relate well to others, put them in a situation where they can only accomplish a task by gaining the cooperation of others.

CARROTS AND STICKS – WHY BOTHER?

Many hiring managers wrongly assume that training, incentives, and disciplinary action will change people who are not doing the job right. With time, many people can change their behavior, but quite simply, most won't. Behavioral hiring says "let's not concern ourselves with teaching an old dog a new trick. Let's find a 'dog' who sincerely likes to do the tricks we need." If you start with the right person, management is infinitely easier.

Remember, there is no such thing as a good or bad behavioral style, but there are a lot of people in the wrong job. Companies must find employees who fit all aspects of the position—skills and behavioral traits. And, the best way to predict future behavior is to look at past behavior. By incorporating behavioral based questions and tests in the screening process, companies can greatly lessen the likelihood of a bad hire and put themselves in a more competitive position.

So, stop pounding those square pegs into round holes!