

Everyone Looks Good on Paper!

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With all the books on writing resumes and cover letters, and all the professional services out there that actually write job search paperwork for candidates, I've come to the realization that everyone looks good on paper. The question that leaders like you need to answer accurately is, "how will this person look in six months?"

Some of our client organizations use psychological assessments to help them hire candidates, others do not. In the current marketplace, with multiple candidates for every open position, you might decide that it's a "buyer's market" out there and every candidate is a great one. You might conclude that your current hiring process already does a good job of filtering out the worst candidates and netting the best ones. If that is your firm mindset as you begin reading this, you can stop right now; this Leadersynth edition will not be helpful to you!

On the other hand, if you look at the success rate for your new hires over the last several years and think "there must be a better way," you might learn something here. This is the story of a recent hire for a client organization that illustrates an effective series of steps to insure the best hires.

TQX, a mid-sized manufacturing company, was looking to hire a senior design engineer. At the beginning of their search, they were contacted by Tom, an engineer from a competitor, about possible job openings at TQX. The COO and CEO were somewhat familiar with Tom and his career at the competitor. In fact, the COO lived near him; their kids attended the same high school and had played in the same soccer league growing up. The COO knew Tom as a friend and neighbor, and she was favorably inclined to hire him. However, the CEO had a nephew who worked at Tom's current employer, and the nephew's sense of Tom was that he was arrogant and difficult to work with, sometimes responding with inappropriate emotion when upset.

TQX called me in to conduct a pre-hire psychological assessment. The COO, CEO, and I met up front to discuss the position and what their desires were for the successful senior design engineer candidate. I left with a clear sense of what they wanted in the position and what they liked and disliked about Tom from their first interview, as well as their knowledge of him from other sources.

We sent a couple of personality tests and a critical thinking assessment to Tom as pre-work, and then I met in person with him to conduct an in-depth behavioral interview. In particular, I focused on his challenges, successes, and failures in previous roles and projects, as well as the aspects of his work that had motivated him throughout his career. At one point, we talked about the last couple of years at his current employer, and it was clear that he had been involved in a project that did not go well and had caused him a great deal of stress. He obviously had not felt supported by senior management in the project, and, in fact, there had been legal issues for which he was called to testify in court. It had been very unpleasant for him.

At another point in the interview, I asked him what was motivating him to leave his current employer. As he answered, he began to tell me about how his wife had been involved in a serious car accident about a year ago, and how stressed he felt traveling out of town for projects and leaving his wife and

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kids at home as she recuperated. At this point, tears began to well up in his eyes and his voice became choked with emotion.

He was able to finish the interview, and, after he left the office, I thought about these new data points he had shared. First, it was clear that he was on the rebound from a very negative work experience in which he felt unsupported by his management. Second, it was clear that he had a tendency to become overwhelmed and uncomfortable reaching out for help when he needed it on projects. Third, I began to understand why others might have experienced him as arrogant and difficult to work with, with all the upset related to his wife's recovery and his extensive travel schedule.

After writing a report describing the key attributes of this candidate, I met again with the CEO and COO to discuss the report and dig more deeply into our collective overall impressions. They found it helpful to ask questions and hear me elaborate on his potential strengths and development areas. In particular, they were a bit surprised that Tom became emotional in the interview. I described him in the report as someone who expresses his feelings openly, in part due to my interview observations, but also due to several scales on the personality tests. This discussion helped us pull together the various bits of data from his workplace, the interview, and the test results that supported the notion that he was likely to wear his feelings on his sleeve.

Other than these couple of concerns, however, Tom was a very strong candidate. He was smart, personable, strategic, creative in problem solutions, and a hard worker. Just the kind of person they wanted in the senior design engineer role. To allay any lingering concerns, they circled back to Tom to discuss their perceptions of his style under pressure. They liked his responses and decided to hire him.

This story, for which the names and other specifics were changed, illustrates several key steps to build success into any organizational hiring process:

- Be clear upfront what you want/need in a candidate for a particular position
- Conduct initial interviews internally to narrow down your list and screen out poor candidates
- Use additional resources to screen candidates beyond internal behavioral interviews. In this case, it involved using an external psychologist to administer tests and an additional interview; it also included data from an insider at the individual's current job and the perspective of a neighbor in the community. Using standardized tests, particularly personality and abilities assessments, can provide a helpful norm-based perspective for hiring.
- Discuss the candidate in the light of all the data and use the discussion to explore the possible meanings of the data you have on the candidate. Use this time to identify development areas for the candidate that, if you hire the individual, you can begin to address when he/she first begins to work.
- Circle back to the candidate to discuss potential concerns and see how he/she responds
- Make your final decision

Remember: everyone looks good on paper, and most people can manage to look good for at least a first screening interview. Use objective and standardized sources of data to help you paint a picture of what a candidate will really be like six months after being hired! Roselle Leadership Strategies offers value-priced Selection Assessments to help build success into your hiring and promotion strategies.