



Personality tests help peg the best workers

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On paper the job candidate looks perfect, with the right education, experience and references. But many employers won't stop there.

More and more companies are using specialized tests to screen candidates, as well as to train, develop and motivate employees.

Hundreds of screening tests are available, experts said. In the Midlands, the most popular tests include Gallup's Strengths-based Selection System, the Predictive Index and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

Employers choose the tests that best fit their needs, said Jo Prabhu, chief executive of International Services Group, a placement firm based in Long Beach, Calif., and the resource management group's expert on testing.

For example, she said, "very large companies use Myers-Briggs when trying to fill upper-management positions, because the test is both expensive and extensive."

Prabhu said her firm screens and conducts background checks on at least 100 job candidates for openings in several states.

Albert Macchietto with Alley-Poyner Macchietto Architecture in Omaha said his firm, which has 27 employees, has used the Predictive Index for two years.

"It's purely a read on a person's personality traits," he said.

The test is one page long, front and back, and lists 86 traits on each page. On the first page, candidates are instructed to check those words that "you feel describe the way you are expected to act by others." On the back, candidates are asked to check those words that "you yourself believe really describe you."

Along with being easy and straightforward, the test appealed to the company on three levels, Macchietto said:

- 1. As a management tool to help supervisors develop the best way to utilize an individual's traits.
- 2. As a team-building tool. "This person has leadership skills, these people operate better as assistants, if that's a word. You don't want to put two people on the same team who want to run the ship."
- 3. As an aid for supervisors to manage their people and for employees to manage the managers and owners.

Participation among employees was voluntary when the firm adopted the Predictive Index, but everyone agreed to take the test, Macchietto said.

"We've used it for two years and we're very satisfied with it," Macchietto said. "It's been great to find out whether a personality will work with the group. It allows us to focus on a person's true personality."

"In an interview, anyone can project a certain personality or trait. It's harder to do on this test."

David Krecek, a consultant with P.I. Midwest, which markets the test, said it dates to 1955, is used

worldwide and has been translated into more than 60 languages.

Cindy Lynes, marketing manager for P.I. Worldwide, said about 177 companies in Nebraska and 120 companies in Iowa use the test.

Larry B. Good, president and owner of P.I. Midwest, said he first encountered the Predictive Index as one of the co-owners of the Ranch Bowl.

"We were going through a period of high turnover. . . . Back then these types of tests were looked at as voodoo," he said.

But Good said the Ranch Bowl owners were pleased because the test cut turnover dramatically between 1984 and 1987.

"You can hire somebody in a second," he said, "but how do I manage, motivate and encourage them? This test can help managers set people up to succeed."

Laurie Pieper, director of human resources at the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber uses Gallup's Clifton StrengthFinder and Gallup's Q Employee Engagement program once people are hired. The latter test identifies ways to better motivate employees.

Emily Meyer, a manager at Gallup, said more than 500 clients use the firm's Strengths-based Selection System. Nearly 4 million people have completed assessments, she said.

StrengthFinder, which is done online, gives individuals a list of their top five strengths -- "things they are naturally good at," Meyer explained.

After taking the test, individuals meet with Gallup consultants one-on-one and in team sessions to discuss their performances.

"The test, which is based on 40 years of research, can help them learn how their talents impact their performance and business outcomes."

The Q is a survey of 12 questions that measures an employee's engagement with the business, Meyer said. She estimated that at least 30 organizations, schools and churches in Nebraska take the StrengthFinders test and that 10 use the Q

Gallup can customize a test for individual businesses, she said.

A consultant "studies a company's best performers and develops a selection instrument that measures for that talent," she said, so a company can use it to make hiring decisions.

The Myers-Briggs test was developed by Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, in the 1940s. It was designed to help women who were entering the industrial work force for the first time during World War II. It identified the kind of wartime jobs where they would be "most comfortable and effective."

By the 1960s, the initial questionnaire was refined into the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test.

Essentially, the test defines different personality types and how each behaves. It then describes how to take those tendencies into account in interactions at work.