



Quizzing for the Right Fit

Personality tests become standard for hiring and promoting employees.

By Michael Laff

As with any other type of performance, interviewing for a position requires winning over an audience. But unlike performance attendees, who can walk out of the theater if the show is a flop, it is much more difficult to walk away from a failed hire.

Because the stakes are higher, employing or promoting a candidate creates anxiety for organizations that fear making the wrong selection. According to Herb Greenberg, CEO of Caliper, managers are often fooled by the “interview star”—an individual who demonstrates a high motivation to make the interviewer like him.

Caliper has designed a personality test that is used by companies in a variety of fields. The test questions range from inquiries about one’s personality to selecting a single word that best describes the test taker such as “ungoverned” or “unimaginative.”

Initially, test takers might believe they can fudge their way through the exam, but Greenberg insists the questions are designed to tease out even the best actor’s true personality.

Qualitative questions attempt to determine where an individual falls between

Inside **Intelligence**:

Workers trust managers over higher-ups	14
The act of walking uncovers hidden employee dilemmas	16
Website offers shadowy new forum to dis your friends/ Fast facts on grad salaries	18
Survey reveals what peers really think of retirees/ Slow going in the pipeline for talent	19

two extremes, such as “a strong leader should always worry about the feelings of others.”

The questions are formulated in such a way that test takers who want to select the socially acceptable answer will eventually drop their guard. Greenberg says that initially, test takers will seek the most admirable trait, but eventually just answer honestly.

“Whether you are trying to fake it or trying to tell the truth, your personality will emerge,” he says.

“They were little yellow blinkers, not red flags.”

Greenberg candidly admits that he, too, was impressed by a recent hire at his own organization whom he later had to dismiss. Some warning signs existed in the employee’s test, such as lack of self-esteem and overly aggressive behavior, but they were not strong enough to be dissuaded from making the hire.

“They were little yellow blinkers, not red flags,” Greenberg says. He emphasizes that the test should be one component among other measurements used to determine whether to hire or promote an individual. To gauge whether a newcomer is a right fit, Greenberg suggests testing the department’s management team as well.

The testing can be used for more than judging the suitability of a potential hire, because it also offers the opportunity to serve as a coaching tool. Management can work with individuals who acknowledge difficulty with time management or being flexible with co-workers.

A staffing agency that has used the test for 15 years believes it to be a reliable indicator of an individual’s fitness for a position when taken into consideration with a thorough interview.

“We decided to hire against the recommendation of the test results twice in the last two years,” says Kim Marzano, director of recruiting for The Advanced Group of Companies. “We were proven wrong each time.”

Michael Laff is senior associate editor for T+D; mlaff@astd.org.

Interviews That Get Personal

Each group below contains four statements expressing personal viewpoints. Candidates are asked to select the one statement that reflects the viewpoint most like theirs in each group, then fill in the “most” circle on an answer sheet. From the remaining choices, they select the one statement that least reflects their viewpoint, and fill in the “least” circle on an answer sheet.

- 1 A | Sometimes it’s better to lose than to risk hurting someone.
B | I’m generally good at making “small talk.”
C | Established practices and/or standards should always be followed.
D | I sometimes lose control of my workday.
- 2 A | I rarely have second thoughts about decisions I have made.
B | I’m very careful not to be aggressively demanding of others.
C | I usually stop at yellow lights, rather than race through them.
D | People will often take advantage of you without giving it a second thought.
- 3 A | I think managers worry too much about their people’s feelings and not enough about the bottom line.
B | I work best in situations where I am in control.
C | Even when winning might be at stake, it’s better not to be too forceful.
D | I sometimes worry about things that I can’t control.
- 4 A | I need immediate results.
B | People’s dislike doesn’t really bother me.
C | If I follow my preset objectives, I may not take care of the really important things.
D | If something has worked in the past, it’s better to stick with it.
- 5 A | If threatened, I’ll back off rather than fight.
B | Most people would never intentionally deceive you.
C | Once I give priority to a project, I follow it through.
D | If I can’t do something quickly, I get frustrated.
- 6 A | I don’t let day-to-day difficulties affect me.
B | I look forward to a good party with lots of people.
C | Most people are trustworthy.
D | I will risk untried but promising ways rather than follow safe proven ways.
- 7 A | When I’m with people who I don’t know, making small talk is quite difficult.
B | People who act too slowly are an annoyance to me.
C | I have no regrets about things that I’ve done.
D | Even if something new sounds good, I tend to prefer what’s already established.
- 8 A | I prefer knowing exactly how something should be done before I begin.
B | I sometimes have difficulty getting started after I have been criticized.
C | I’d rather run my own business, and take the chance of failing, than be an executive in a well-established, secure firm.
D | A good manager’s decisions should not be overly influenced by the feelings of others.
- 9 A | I’m willing to be pushy in order to get what I want done.
B | I work best when I can decide what to do and how to do it.
C | Too much empathy can often hinder a negotiation.
D | I base my decisions on facts not ideas.
- 10 A | Time management is not one of my key strengths.
B | I’m always cool, calm and collected.
C | The best part of a party is meeting new people.
D | I never hesitate to take quick action.

Source: Caliper

Trust Issues

Employees have more confidence in their own managers than in top execs.

Which term would an employee be more likely to use to describe the company CEO: trustworthy or deceptive?

Given the number of recent corporate scandals, the latter term is the likely choice. However, the distrust does not filter down to middle management.

BlessingWhite, a New Jersey-based consulting agency, conducted the survey, "The State of Employee Engagement 2008," which revealed that

"I trust my manager"

Disagree or strongly disagree 13%

Neither agree nor disagree 12%

Agree or strongly agree 75%



employees trust their own managers more than top management, by a sizable margin.

The study of more than 7,500 workers on four continents revealed that 75 percent of employees trust their own managers, compared with only 60 percent who trust the senior leaders of the organization.

Chris Rice, CEO of BlessingWhite, explains that this lack of trust could be related to the discrepancy between what senior leaders say they will do and what they actually do.

"When it comes to standard things that are done in companies—changes of strategy, terminations, acquisitions, closing down product lines, opening up product lines—the typical employee does not know all the details," he says. "A common misunderstanding of executives is the idea that if they communicate something once, it satisfies all of the requirements."

In North America, only 53 percent of employees trusted their senior leaders, compared with 75 percent who trusted their direct managers. On the other hand, 22 percent did not trust the senior leaders of their organization, compared with only 13 percent who did not trust their managers.

The difficulty senior leaders encounter when building or rebuilding trust is that they are somewhat removed from the rest of the company.

"Most top executives don't regularly get to interact with employees, which puts a burden on them to take care in how they communicate and behave," Rice says. And he has some suggestions for improving relations within companies.

"I think executives need to dedicate more time to different forms of communication than they typically do,"

Rice says. "They should be doing town hall meetings and presentations. But all executives get very busy, and they've moved onto another topic when employees are still processing the last thing they announced."

Aparna Nancherla is an associate editor for T+D; anancherla@astd.org.



"I trust the senior leaders of this organization"

Disagree or strongly disagree22%

Neither agree nor disagree25%

Agree or strongly agree53%

NOTE: Reflects respondents in North America.
Source: BlessingWhite



Leaving the Corner Office

A management style popularized decades ago is resurfacing as a tool to engage and retain talent.

Using the technique called Management by Walking Around (MBWA), employers can identify potential office space maladies before they occur.

The technique is unorthodox and requires effort for employers who often rely on email to address uncomfortable topics. However, the benefits of simply walking around exceed the inconvenience of getting out from behind the computer monitor.

This method is a hands-on approach to management that was developed by Bill Hewlett and David Packard in the 1940s and re-introduced in the 1980s by Tom Peters in his book *In Search of Excellence*.

Several organizations that have successfully implemented this management practice include Hewlett-Packard, GE, PepsiCo, Corning Glass, 3M, and Wal-Mart.

"MBWA makes it unnecessary for employees to have to go to their managers with problems. Most

employees won't do that anyway," says Greg Gostanian, managing partner at ClearRock, a Boston-based consultancy.

"Employees are asked if there are any ways they know that will help improve the running of the company. In that kind of an environment, their input is encouraged and valued."

ClearRock says the technique can help increase an organization's profits, minimize losses, and improve retention. Uncovering customer service problems is another possible outcome.

"Performing MBWA is similar in a way to businesses that receive a complaint from a dissatisfied customer," says Annie Stevens, managing partner at ClearRock. "A number of mistakes can only be uncovered by managers and executives going out and seeing first-hand whether there is a problem."

Gostanian and Stevens identify several guidelines for successful

implementation of this technique.

First, employers should talk to each employee and prepare for honest feedback. They should ask each employee what she does and how it could be done better, to develop a clearer understanding of individual roles.

Employers should also encourage dialogue beyond business-related issues to show the employee he is valued as a person.

Finally, managers should not be critical. If an employee's performance warrants correction, the employer should address the situation

at another time. Supervisors should reward an employee's valuable contributions that are uncovered through this technique.

The benefits of simply walking around exceed the inconvenience of getting out from behind the computer monitor.

Ann Pace is editorial assistant for T+D; apace@astd.org.

// FAST FACT //

The job market may have never looked better for recent college grads. According to a new study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, in 2008, average starting salaries saw a 7.1 percent jump from those tracked during the summer of 2007.

These salaries appear to be on the rise in many cases. Some of the biggest boosts will benefit graduates in computer science, chemical engineering, business administration and management, and even liberal arts, with 13.1 percent, 6.4 percent, 5.1 percent, and 12.6 percent increases, respectively.

For holders of some degrees, including information sciences and systems, gains were modest, with many hovering at increases around 3 percent. But on the whole, the survey results represent a meaningful vault in light of the fact that the same survey held in the spring of this year, indicated more of a plateau in salaries for new grads.

Average salaries for the big gainers include a \$60,416 salary for computer science majors, \$63,165 for chemical engineers, \$45,915 for business grads, and \$36,419 for those studying liberal arts.

OTHER BIG INCREASES:

	% Increase	Avg. Salary
Civil engineering	6.4%	\$51,632
Mechanical engineering	5.3%	\$57,009
Marketing	4.7%	\$42,053
Economics	4.2%	\$50,507



The Anonymous Truth

A new verb is about to enter the lexicon of cybercommunications. People frequently “text” friends, “Facebook” acquaintances, or “Google” strangers.

Now they can Redtoll rivals. It’s the latest in the online world’s see-but-remain unseen phenomenon.

The site continues the hit-and-run tradition of websites that permit users to slam someone anonymously without being identified. Other sites have played host to angry critics, such as newsmait.com for frustrated reporters, disgruntledhousewife.com for the obvious, and groupiecentral.com for disappointed rock and roll fans.

Redtoll.com allows users to send a comment via email. The site boasts that people no longer need to keep quiet about a friend with an unpleasant habit, tolerate sexist co-workers, or resist paying a compliment. With Redtoll, people can speak the truth, confidentially resolving issues or expressing thoughts they would not otherwise make known.

As expected, the founder of Redtoll prefers to remain anonymous and the site’s press launch deliberately excluded any names.

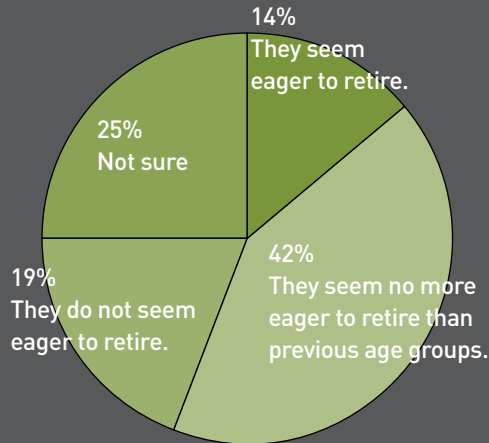
The site lets people post comments that they don’t want to deliver in person. A private Redtoll is meant strictly for the recipient. Once a comment is posted, the recipient will be sent an email alert. The recipient won’t know the sender’s identity and must view the comment online. The recipient can delete or respond to the comment.

Anyone who searches for and finds comments that were posted as “Public Redtolls” can view the posting. Unlike private posting, the recipient cannot delete a public post but may respond to it. As with many of its peers, the site’s long-term prospects are dicey. Many sites boosted by the venom of posters make a loud entrance, only to run out of steam within a year or two.

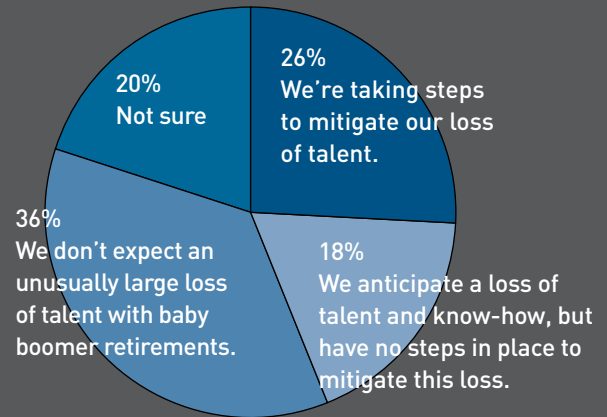
Michael Laff

Boomers Move Out

How do you characterize the attitude toward retirement of the baby boomers in your organization?



With respect to retiring baby boomers, how do you describe the situation at your organization?



Source: Novations Group

Talent Pipeline Runs Dry

Despite all the emphasis on the need to plan for the near future, organizations are making little progress in addressing executive-level succession planning. This is according to an assessment of leading companies by IMD International Search and Consulting, one of the world's largest executive search organizations.

In a survey titled "The Changing Face at the Top," nearly 400 senior human resources executives from 24 countries shared their insights on trends regarding talent demand and acquisition, diversity, and succession planning.

Internal senior management development is falling short of expectations, as nearly one-third of CEOs, 30 percent of chief operating officers, and one-half of chief financial officers are hired from outside the organization.

Even more alarming, only 30 percent of survey participants indicated that they identified a successor for their CEO, CFO, and COO positions. While 63 percent of respondents indicated that their organizations have a succession plan, only 44 percent believed that it was making a difference.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents believe the impending retirement of baby boomers will further increase the severity of the executive talent shortage. Almost 80 percent of respondents said talent acquisition is more difficult today than three years ago, but only two-thirds agreed that talent acquisition is among the top three concerns at the corporate board level.



YES!

I want to subscribe for only \$99, (\$165 Outside the U.S.) to T+D magazine—12 monthly issues that keep me at the forefront of workplace learning and performance.

TD0833

Order Information

Name: _____

Title: _____ Company: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Country: _____ Email: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Check One: \$99 (USA) \$165 (Outside the US)
 VISA MasterCard Amex Discover Check (USD) (Payable to T+D)

Card Number: _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature: _____

Fax this form to 1.703.683.9591 OR Mail to: T+D, P.O. Box 1567; Merrifield, Virginia, 22116-9812, USA

Order online at store.astd.org
Phone: 1.800.628.2783 (1.703.683.8100 outside the US)

Orders processed within three business days.
If you have questions, please contact subscriberservice@astd.org

Prices valid through 12/31/2008. If you should wish to cancel your subscription for any reason, you will receive a refund on all unmailed issues.
Your subscription to T+D may be a tax deductible business expense.
Please allow 6 to 8 weeks to receive your first issue.

T+D is published by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

010859.63250

