

# Knowing What You're Looking for in Employees... Getting Predictive Answers

By Cheryl Crumb

Both my kids were looking for jobs this summer... in the service sector. Unfortunately but not surprisingly many employers spent a whole 10 minutes on the interviews. Sometimes you can get lucky (i.e., hiring MY kids)...but most of the time, 10 minutes is a poor investment for a process that has direct impact on your most valuable asset – your customers!

In the last issue ("Employees for Keeps") we talked about hiring people who think, assert, and create, rather than those who conform and obey robotically. We gave you a 6-step process to increase the likelihood of hiring successfully.

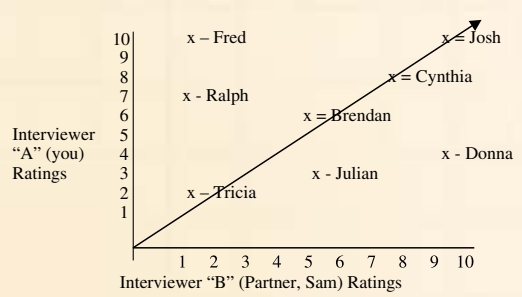
## 6-STEP SYSTEMATIC HIRING PROCESS

1. Skills Analysis
2. Competencies
3. Questions
4. Conduct Interview
5. Evaluation of Applicants
6. Make Decision

The objective of a process is to reduce inconsistencies. This means that if you and your business partner, Sam, have separate interviews with some applicants, you'll both come to an agreement on which ones to turf out to your competition, and which to hoard to yourself. A good process is one that consistently allows you to identify the deadbeats and zero in on the superstars.

When we look at the diagram below, the reliable assessments were those of Tricia, Brendan, Cynthia and Josh. Why? Because both raters were in agreement... good or bad. Studies have suggested that a second evaluator can reduce hiring errors by up to 50%... provided a systematic process is utilized.

Consider this scattergram.



In this issue, we'll address the second and third steps of our hiring process...Competencies and Questions. This begins with identifying the technical skills and performance competencies. It helps to make a priority-order wish list of the qualifications (including human, emotional and social) this person must possess if s/he is to capably perform the job. Every competency should have prepared associated questions.

So, let's say the sign in your window says, "Help Wanted: Customer Service Professional". What competencies do you want this person to have? Every individual possesses a unique configuration of skills... are they the configuration your organization demands? First, start with the technical ones (as long as we don't stop there!). This might include things like: cash register aptitude, electronics familiarity, and computer literacy (web page design, spreadsheets...).

Next, it's the identification of human, emotional and social dimensions of behaviour. Why are these so important? When people are terminated, it's more likely due to a lack of human dimensions than a skills omission. If our Customer Service Professional would be working in a hotbed of activity, consider such competencies as:

- Coping with stress
- Customer focus
- Team player
- Personal accountability
- Work ethic
- Ability to learn
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Initiating change
- Problem analysis
- Creativity

Questions need to be asked for each dimension. Have several preplanned, and allow yourself to be spontaneous to others based upon the answers you get. The rule is "don't ask a question if it's not related to an identified competency". Consider it a waste of effort...an investment with no return. Let's take a few of the above competency dimensions and form some questions. Use information contained in the

resume, if available, to target your questions. Behavior-oriented questions about what the applicant has done in the past are powerful predictors for future success. Avoid theoretical "would you" questions, as they're more likely to lead to textbook answers. Example: It's far better to ask, "Tell me about a time when you had to manage a difficult customer situation." rather than "What would you do if a customer were irrational?" A "real" answer is one that pinpoints names, numbers, dates, locations and times. Probe until you get the actions taken, the effects of those actions, and the awareness of what the candidate learned. Avoid questions referencing race, sex, and marital status, as they are illegal and irrelevant.

## PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Give me some examples of experiences in your last job that you felt were particularly satisfying.
- Tell me about when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement.
- What are some additional responsibilities that you took on in a recent job? What were the implications?
- What are you most proud of during your working career to date?
- What mistakes did you make in previous assignments that provided a learning opportunity?
- Describe a time when you made an extraordinary effort to meet a deadline. What were the results? What did you learn from the experience?

## TEAM PLAYER

Tell me about group work projects you've been involved with. What worked? What didn't? What did you learn about yourself through the experience?

- What are some actions you've taken in past jobs to enhance staff being more cohesive?
- What was the toughest "fellow-employee" problem you've encountered? What did you do? What happened? How did that experience affect other challenging situations?

(Continued on page 26)

home. It's easily portable, and with wireless on the horizon for display connectivity, the consumer benefits are tremendous. Right now, we think that 30% of our shipments are being used in the kitchen, which in itself is pretty interesting. We see the kitchen as the hub of the home, and the applications for data, our smart card slots and so on can make the display a much more useful device.

**C.E.BIZ:** *What new product do you see on the horizon that will impact the industry as importantly as DTV and DVD have done?*

**G.C.:** It's not necessarily the product, but more how these products talk to each other, and the transport mechanism. The combination of wireless and broadband gets me excited. Each digital product is cool on its own, but getting them all to work together will be huge. It's a free flow of data.

**C.E.BIZ:** *Consumers seem to expect prices for electronics to continuously drop, as exemplified by DVD players. Is there a solution, or is the industry built on the foundation of "feature up...cost down"?*

**G.C.:** It's a tough question, but as long as we have good competition, we'll have this love/hate relationship with that kind of business model. It's a model that's entrenched, and unfortunately, as long as there is competition it's unlikely that it will change. We are in the "Consumer" electronics business, and whenever you include the consumer in your business, you are marketing to the masses, and it becomes a volume business.

**C.E.BIZ:** *If you were a retailer, what would you do to improve your profitability?*

**G.C.:** I think that retailers underestimate what the manufacturers can do for them. There's a loosely used term "partnership" that's been abused over the years. If we could ever bring it back to what it truly means, I think that utilizing the entire value chain would make us all more profitable.

## CREATIVITY

- What were some innovative ideas you introduced in your last job?
- Tell me about the kind of work environment or conditions that enhance your own personal creativity.
- What kind of problems did your past/present employer call on you to solve? Tell me what you created.
- What changes in systems or processes might people say were due primarily to your initiative?

## CUSTOMER FOCUS

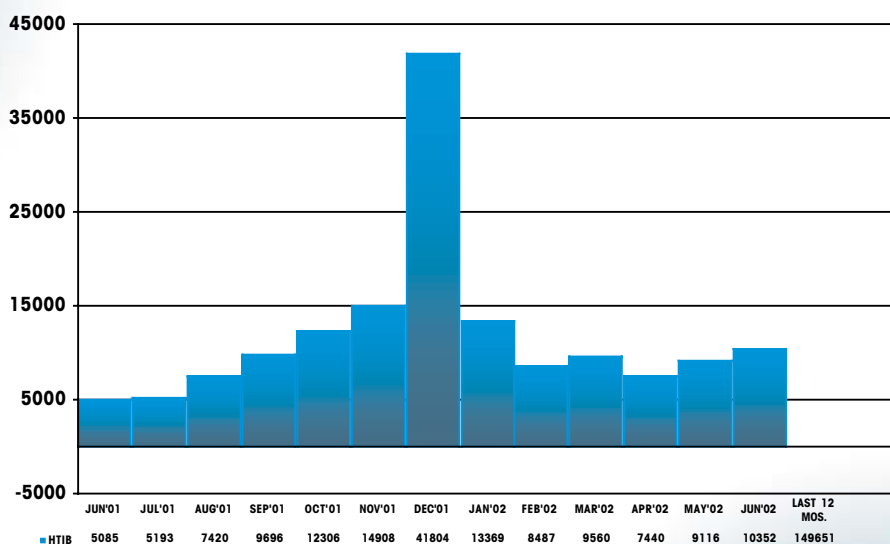
- Give me some examples where you've gone beyond what the customer asked for?
- What is the customer situation about which you feel most proud?
- What were some of the internal challenges you had to face in being able to offer a customer a delighting experience?
- Tell me about the most difficult customer you've encountered. What happened? What action did you take? What was the result? What did you learn from the experience? How did that impact the next difficult customer situation?
- What is an example of how you had to balance providing value to the customer with providing value to your employer?

The identification of the appropriate competencies and targeting of questions will get the candidate talking... enough so that you will be in a better position to determine whether there's a fit with your job vacancy.

Remember, many applicants have strengths, but not for all jobs. Let process be your guide. Next issue, we'll zero in on conducting the interview.

## Seasonal Trends

### Trended Unit Sales for Home Theatre in a Box.



Intellect has established a panel of strategic retail partners, who report their retail transactions in a completely confidential manner. Intellect then collates all the data, to determine consumer preferences, pricing, sku trends, and share by brand and sku. Each merchant receives confidential reports on a monthly basis, indicating their performance against the national trends, as established with the collated data, in exchange for their participation on the panel.

For additional information, or to apply to become part of the panel, please contact: Adrian Murphy, Vice President, Retail Relations 416- 445-1804.

