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Interviews: Do they predict job performance?

Marysville, WA - October 8, 2002 - In person and telephone interviews are the standard practice in the selection of candidates for most positions. However, many employers don't realize that the usual interview process, by itself, is probably not a good measure of future job performance, according to Frank Heasley, PhD, President and CEO, MedZilla.com, a leading Internet recruitment and professional community that targets jobseekers and HR professionals in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, healthcare and science.

"Employers shouldn't make hiring decisions solely on an interview or two. Many job candidates today are well trained in the art of interviewing - and that can make it difficult to recognize candidates who are truly qualified from those who simply sell themselves very well," Dr. Heasley says.

"Research shows that it [the interview] is equal to random 'chance.' You might as well pull names out of a hat and save all the time and money," says Stephanie Thompson Managing Director, Chief Corporate Psychologist & Coach, Insight Matters, at http://www.CorporatePsychology.com.

According to Thompson, most interviews are conducted by people never trained in the art or science of interviewing and selection decision-making. Many organizations assume that anyone can do it. "Even trained interviewers using structured processes still only predict a small portion of subsequent job performance - about 20%. The biggest mistake is to try to predict a candidate's hands-on abilities, or intellect, from an interview," she says.

Better ways to assess job performance include the use of multiple assessment processes, including applied ability tests, simulation exercises and personality and behavioral profilers. However, Thompson warns, it is essential to select well-designed tools because the quality varies dramatically and so does the level of skilled interpreters. With a good tool, the results can then be 60% or more prediction, depending on the role, she says.

For those who want to refine their interviewing skills -- to get a clearer candidate picture from the face-to-face meeting -- Thompson says that the first step is to know what you are looking for and why, before you even advertise the role. "Only then can you design questions and processes to

elicit those things," Thompson says. "Most interviewers ask questions the wrong way - e.g. 'leading' and 'closed' questions - or talk too much themselves. There are ways of phrasing questions, which will get you much more useful and accurate information - such as 'open' questions and 'funneling' down. These things have to be trained. Humans are also desperately biased in irrelevant ways, such as toward people with similar hair and eye color. These are instinctual things, which people need to be made aware of, so they can adjust for them. Asking about the real person -their values, likes, dislikes, etc - is also very helpful - not just superficial chatter about technical knowledge and experience."

Bob Epstein, president of New Mexico-based Epstar, a firm that performs assessments and offers human resources consulting, agrees that interviews rarely predict job performance. He says the interview alone is not enough and recommends using an assessment tool. "We use an assessment that measures a person's various mental abilities; various interests, such as do they like working with people and data, and various behaviors," he says. "They're measured on a bell curve scale of one to 10 so that we can actually see how much of an extrovert someone is, how much they like change and how competitive they are. We can also see their reasoning ability."

The assessment is customized to reflect the benchmark of qualities of the company's top performers. This allows employers to compare a candidate for the job to that benchmark to help predict job fit and performance.

The tool, according to Epstein had been invaluable for his clients. "Several of our clients have had dramatic results by not making bad hiring decisions. It costs a fortune, not only in dollars but in managerial time, morale and lost production, to make a bad hiring decision."

Epstein's advice to employers is to first determine a person's company fit by finding out if the person has the skills and background needed and if that person will fit in the corporate culture. Then, use an assessment to further hone your thoughts. Based on the previous steps, decide whether or not to interview the candidate. If you decide to do the interview, you can use the information you have to target the questions and make your hiring decision.

Dr. Heasley adds, "In a laboratory or clinical setting, it is important to accurately assess a candidate's abilities under actual working conditions. While communications skills are essential in these fields, the ability to work effectively with the "tools of the trade" cannot be determined through questions alone. Putting the candidate through a practical exam for an hour or two will highlight skills, or incompetence, far more effectively than verbal interaction."

About MedZilla.com

Established in mid 1994, MedZilla is the original web site to serve career and hiring needs for

professionals and employers in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medicine, science and healthcare. MedZilla databases contain about 10,000 open positions and 10,000 resumes from candidates actively seeking new positions. These resources have been characterized as the largest, most comprehensive databases of their kind on the web in the industries served.

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