2010 Best Practices Tip

Avoid Firing Employees by Hiring Qualified Candidates

Unemployment benefits are paid to employees who are terminated due to an inability to perform the job. It may be that the individual lacks necessary training or experience; however, it may also be that the person simply lacks the aptitude or interpersonal capabilities necessary to perform the required job duties. When faced with this situation, the employee must be terminated which can be a costly and unpleasant experience for everyone involved. Rather than trying to determine the "best" way to terminate an unqualified employee, it is important to examine why that person was hired. By utilizing a comprehensive, job-related, and legally defensible selection system, organizations can improve their quality of hire. Answering the following questions will help an employer develop an effective hiring process.

What are the requirements of the job?

To ensure that employers do not hire unqualified candidates, they must thoroughly understand what the job in question requires. *Job analysis* is a process that gathers job-related information from job experts through surveys, focus groups, and other means. The result of this process is a job profile which provides a comprehensive picture of the required job tasks and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics needed to perform those tasks. The information in the job profile is critical for selection; however, it can also be used for job description, performance appraisal, and employee development initiatives.

What selection tools are available to evaluate candidates based on the job requirements?

When someone mentions hiring tools, it is common to first think of resumes and applications. However, there are many other methods and tools that are much more effective.

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◆ **Tests and assessments:** Organizations use assessments to ensure that candidates have the abilities required for successful performance and the characteristics required for job fit. For instance, an administrative job may require the ability to use Microsoft Excel which can be assessed with a skills test. The same job might require a high level of attention to detail which can be measured using a personality/behavioral assessment. Pre-employment assessments can be used to measure job candidates' abilities (e.g., numerical ability, mechanical reasoning, and critical thinking), traits and interpersonal characteristics (e.g., dependability, customer focus, and teamwork), and risk for counterproductive behaviors (e.g., theft, absenteeism, and turnover).

◆ **Interviews:** The job interview is the most common and widely used selection tool. However, organizations often use informal, unstructured interviews to "get to know" candidates. Research consistently shows that structured interviews which target job-related characteristics by asking for specific examples of the candidate's past behaviors are more predictive of job performance and potential than unstructured interviews.

◆ **Work Sample:** Work samples require candidates to perform tasks that are similar to the actual job activities. These tools are very useful for simultaneously assessing a combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required to perform an essential job task. For instance, candidates for a mechanic's position may be given a work sample test that requires them to diagnose and fix a broken piece of equipment.

How do I know which tools are best for my organization?

Evaluate any potential selection tools according to the following standards:

◆ **Does the tool measure abilities, skills, or characteristics that are required to successfully perform the job?**
Utilizing selection tools that are job-related will not only ensure the tools are valuable and help you select qualified candidates, but will also help to ensure your process is legally defensible.

◆ **Does the tool have proven validity and reliability?**
If an employer is using pre-employment assessments, the provider of those tools should be able to provide information on their psychometric properties. Validity is another key component of legal defensibility, so the employer should make sure they have this documentation.

◆ **Does the tool fit with your administrative needs and preferences?**
As with any organizational process, it is important to look at the cost and effort involved with using a given selection procedure. For instance, although work samples effectively assess a candidate's qualifications, they are expensive to develop and administer. Similarly, some tests should be given in a supervised situation, while others can be emailed to a candidate and administered online. As the employer is selecting hiring methods, they must ensure they meet their needs and any budgetary or time constraints.

◆ **Does the tool complement the job interview?**
It is unlikely that employers are going to stop interviewing candidates and few experts would recommend it. When building a selection process, employers must think about the interview-- what is it measuring? Should it be refined and enhanced? Upon answering those questions, an employer can select other tools that can be used in combination with the interview to provide a more comprehensive picture of the candidates' qualifications.

Utilizing a job-related, scientifically sound selection process will ensure that candidates who are unable to perform the job are not offered the job. The Industrial/Organizational Psychologists at *pan*, TALX's assessment provider, can help answer the questions above and design a selection system that meets your needs. For more information, contact your Client Relationship Manager or Debbie Hills dhills@panpowered.com, 317-814-8853.