Brainbench
EMPLOYMENT TESTING

A Simple Guide to
SMART HIRING

By Shoa Tavassoli

FOREWORD

Hello friends, my name is Shoa. My boss and I get along, I enjoy my job, and I feel challenged on a daily basis. However, I still feel my heart wrench every time I think there may be one or two people in the world who do not feel similarly satisfied with their work. I want to help. I want employers and employees to be pleased with each other. I want maximum productivity. I want high retention. I want everyone to have the perfect fit that I do. Now, with this guide, I can help.

A Simple Guide to Smart Hiring will provide the simple steps you need to hire people who complement your work environment well. Hiring right is easy. Really easy. You just need to have a reliable process. This guide brings you the process.

Read on. Following the instructions outlined will make your office, nay, your world, a better place. I can help you enjoy the benefits of higher performance, lower retention, and peace of mind. After all, I'm not only a guide writer, I'm also a byproduct of the great process that follows.

INTRODUCTION

Hiring seems easy. You have a quick interview; you make a quick decision, and boom, you quickly have a new employee.

Next thing you know, your new employee quickly quits, and you are again understaffed, spending nights crying yourself to sleep because you just can't seem to find the right person to make your office place…perfect.

What do you do? What can you do? YOU'RE BUSY. Extensive searches and time-consuming interviews are tedious and inefficient. You want a team of employees who are reliable, smart, and hard-working. Is that really so much to ask?

No. It's not. Your candidate is out there, hoping to be hired by a manager as thoughtful, bright, and resistant to baseless — or completely susceptible to — flattery as you. All you need to do is make sure you approach the hiring process by following some guidelines, avoiding some pitfalls, and exercising your staggering intellectual prowess in the final decision stage . All you need to do is follow the "To Do" list.

To Do List:

WRITE DOWN THE TASKS THE INDIVIDUAL WILL PERFORM

Your office is unique, and why wouldn't it be? You are a leader who likes to do things your own way. So, the position you need to fill is probably, much like you, rather unique. That's okay. Do not panic. **DO NOT PANIC.** The right person is out there. Stay calm.

The first step is to get organized. How do you get organized? You get organized by making a list.

You want someone who can do something. So, make a list of what those some-things are. Write down every-thing. These tasks are your expected results.

YOU: Why am I doing this?
ME: Because there are many benefits to defining your expected results in list format:

- By making your expected results clear, you also give the candidate a preview of the reasonable and challenging demands you will have of her/him.

- By making your expected results clear, you let your candidate know she/he is accountable for results! Just like you!

- Maybe the candidate has achieved a goal using a different method or program. Now, not only do you have someone who can produce the desired results, you also have someone who can provide a new and possibly improved approach! If that's not exciting to you, then you have probably dedicated your life to extreme sports that place you in reckless danger every hour.

So, write down everything you expect this position to fulfill. Write down things other people

expect from this position. After you have written it all down, preferably in list format, read it. Decide whether or not you really need this position to be filled by a new person. You would save a lot of money and time by re-allocating smaller tasks to employees who are already trained. So before you continue on with this process, look at your list. Decide whether you need to hire someone new.

WRITE DOWN THE TECHNICAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES THE TASKS REQUIRE

"The secret of all victory lies in the organization of the non-obvious."

— Marcus Aurelius

Now, organize your expectations and the skills necessary to meet those expectations in a chart:

Expectations	Skills and Competencies
Create documentation for C++ program	MS Word, Knowledge of C++, Typing, Listening skills, Collaboration

Make it a long chart. **EVERYTHING** should be in the expectations chart.

"My candidate needs to create documentation for our C++ program," you say.

"How?" I ask.

"By using a word processing program to create and organize thorough user guides that are easily accessible by everyone on the programming team and the customer," you respond, without missing a beat. Perfect. Now make sure you have appropriately written that out so the candidate knows too: Word Processing Program. You want results, and while yes, there are different ways to get these

results, one of the most reliable means is to hire a candidate who possesses the fundamental skills. It also helps to share the expected skills with the candidates. That way, both of you can decide whether she/he can deliver that which you are looking for. You will hear responses such as, "I do not know how to use such a program and will thus be of no use to you," "I have extensive experience," or even, "I don't know, but I can learn." Whichever response you get will be important when making your hiring decision.

The word everything was typed in bold earlier, but it begs repeating. **EVERYTHING.** Make your first list of expectations robust, comprehensive, and thorough. Make sure each item is fully described. Beside each task, write down the skills necessary to complete the task. Do you need a person who can type? Yes. GOOD! Write that down. "Typing skills." What does this person use to type? An office product? Do you need someone familiar with Microsoft Office? Yes? Write that down. No? Don't write that down.

As you can see, this is a complex process comprehendible by only the greatest minds of our time. Write down everything you can think of; you deserve only the best. Do not settle.

Who settles? Losers settle. You are a winner. Write down all the skills and traits you feel make a great employee. Feel free to reflect on attributes of current employees you admire. Feel free to reflect on attributes of yourself you admire.

After you've completed your necessary skills list, pat yourself on the back. You are an astute observer of fine qualities, a vigilant overseer of wonderful employees. Let's face it; you are a humble paragon of fine management. You know what you need for your team.

HAVE OTHERS CHECK YOUR LIST

Three heads are better than one. You may have missed something. You may have been overzealous. You may have been amazing, and only need someone to confirm. Either way, it is in your best interest to have a few of your peers review your list to validate it. Again, three heads are better than one.

MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS LEGALLY COMPLIANT

"Law means good order."
— Aristotle

The EEOC protects the public against discrimination in the workplace. They primarily oversee enforcement of the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. These acts forbid you from discriminating against applicants on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, disability, military service, gender, pregnancy, or age. The Americans with Disability Act specifically states that you cannot discriminate against an applicant with a mental or physical impairment who can perform the essential requirements of the job. Also, reasonable accommodation should be provided to ensure that an applicant will be able perform functions of the job.

You should comply with the law. The best way to comply is to make sure you are limiting your search to applicants who can fulfill the ESSENTIAL functions of the job.

We need to now decide what is and what is not essential. What you legally can, and can not request.

Pull out the chart you completed earlier. Now, go through it and search for the expectations that the position was designed to fulfill. These are expectations that, if removed, would significantly change the job. Put a check mark next to those expectations.

Now go through your chart again and find the expectations that will take up most of the individual's time while in the position. Put a check mark next to those expectations.

Go through your chart again and find the expectations that result in negative consequences if they remain unfulfilled. Put a check mark next to those expectations.

For your final run through of your expectations, which you have probably come to admire as you become more closely acquainted with them, put a mark next to expectations that precedents, job descriptions, or other company documentation says are essential.

Now, every expectation with a mark beside it is "Essential." These essential expectations can be used to determine if a candidate will be hired for the position. It's probably a good idea to disregard anything left on the list, or allocate those tasks to other employees.

Again, the ADA asserts that ability to perform job functions that are not essential should not be used in the hiring process, so make sure your expectations are essential to the job role.

Limit the remainder of your candidate search to the Essential expected results.

CREATE THE JOB DESCRIPTION

As an adolescent I aspired to lasting fame, I craved factual certainty, and I thirsted for a meaningful vision of human life - so I became a scientist. This is like becoming an archbishop so you can meet girls.

— M. Cartmill

Now that you know what you are looking for, you can write your job description. A clear, honest job description is paramount to finding the right candidate. Use your list of expected results (from the chapters cleverly titled Write Down the Tasks the Individual Will Perform and Write Down the Technical Skills and Competencies the Tasks Require and Make Your Expectations Legally Compliant) to create the description. Be sure to include: job title, primary expected results, associated skills, necessary experience and education, and special requirements.

Job Title – Brief, clear, recognizable – There is no need to call a translator a cultural linguistic specialist.

Expected Results – Brief, clear, action-oriented – These are the expected results that will comprise the majority of the applicant's position and require experience

Associated Skills – Brief, clear – These are the skills that accompanied your expected results on your chart

Necessary experience and education – Brief, clear – These are self explanatory

Special Requirements – Brief, clear – for example, "must have security clearance"

Example: Technical Writer
Creates documentation for online applications. Organizes and writes product descriptions and manuals. Also organizes and develops internal material for quality policy. Knowledge of C++, MS Word, good listening skills and good typing skills a must. College education or two years of experience necessary. Security clearance to work on government contracts preferred.

Basically, you want your job description to be brief and clear. (Not garrulous and ambiguous.)
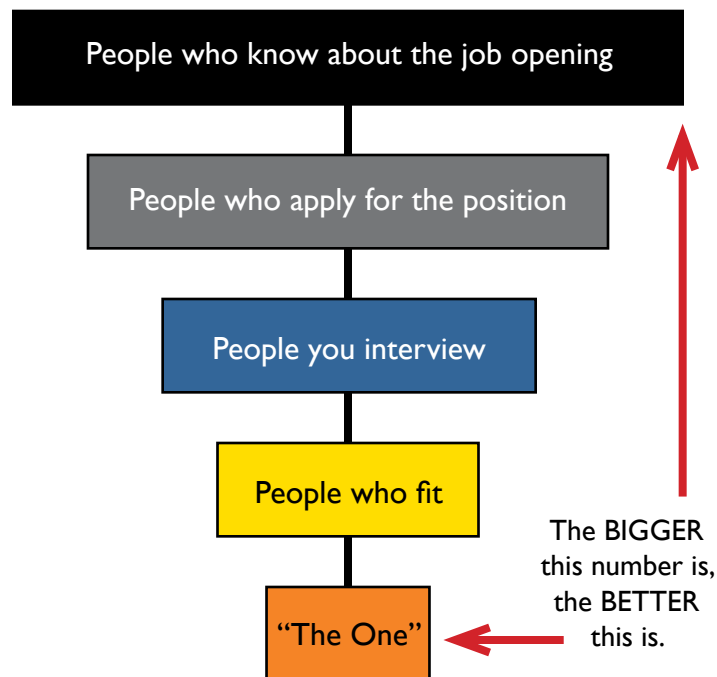
GET THE WORD OUT

Ability will never catch up with the demand for it.
— Malcolm Forbes

After deciding what you need, it is time to set out and get what you need. Publicize your position. Make your applicant pool as large as possible. The more people who know they have the opportunity to work for you, with the skills you require, the

more people will apply. The more people who apply, the more people you can sort through to hire the perfect match for your team.

See highly advanced diagram:

People who know about the job opening

People who apply for the position

People you interview

People who fit

"The One"

The BIGGER this number is, the BETTER this is.

Remember the classic adage, "You have to kiss a lot of frogs to find your prince(ss)"? Well, much like the search for a significant other who is the attractive heir to a small country, the search for the perfect employee demands a large pool. Your odds are much, much better when you have 1000 choices than when you have two.

There are many ways to get the word out: online networking tools, ads, word of mouth, references, and agencies. There are many resources to tap to enlarge your applicant pool. You and your HR person can get together to find out where to go.

Share your list of expected results and skills and competencies because "sharing is caring." The list will make life easier for you, your HR person, and the person applying. Everyone will know what

you are looking for. With the powers of you, your HR representative, and your list combined, you will create the greatest applicant pool known to humankind.

Applications are in, proceed to the next step.

NARROW YOUR APPLICATION POOL

You can tell a lot about a fellow's character by his way of eating jellybeans.

— Ronald Reagan

The above is probably true. However, it may not be legally defensible. So, you should probably use another approach.

If you really want to make sure this hiring business is done right, set up some kind of pre-employment testing.

Pre-employment testing is the legal, reliable, and valid alternative to jellybeans. Tests are designed to measure specific skills, such as proficiency with Microsoft Word, expertise in programming languages like C#, reasoning skills, and even listening skills. Chosen carefully, these tests can provide you insight into how capable your candidate would be in the office place. A vast majority of big companies, and even the federal government, have turned to pre-employment testing to help identify competent candidates and reduce turnover rates.

You CAN'T judge a book by its cover, and why would you when you have tests that can judge content for you? That's right, your wildest dreams have come true: tests CAN assess an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities efficiently and reliably. More importantly, tests can asses an individual's grasp of the tasks, skills, and competencies you placed on your list in previous chapters.

PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

One who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; one who does not ask a question remains a fool forever.

— Chinese proverb

You looked over the resumes you have received. You have narrowed down the list of candidates you would like to interview. You have made contact with your candidates. Now you twiddle your thumbs until the interview time. WRONG. Horribly wrong. Shame on you for scheduling an interview without actually PREPARING for an interview. That's like untying your shoes in front of a race finish line. Why would you do such a thing?

Your first plan of action should be to get your candidate on the phone and talk to her/him briefly about the following:

1. Your company
2. Your position
3. Interview Time and Location
4. What to expect

Interviews are daunting for the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer has to interrogate a stranger, and a stranger has to squirm under scrutiny. You know what really makes it even harder for both parties involved? Lack of preparation. Don't be inconsiderate. Prepare. Plus, preparation will help prevent all of those wretchedly awkward silences, the like of which should be reserved for first dates.

What to prepare/have with you:
(Checked are completed items from previous sections.)

Stuff to make the process go easier
- Refreshments ☐
- Pen/Pencil for note taking ☐
- Paper/Notepad to take notes on ☐

Information on the position
- What you're looking for ☑
- What the previous person, if applicable, did ☑
- Hours ☐
- Projects that need to be completed ☑

Information on the company
- What you do ☐
- What you like about your position ☐

Information on the person
- Know who you're talking to ☐
- Read resumes ☐
- Review any pre-employment test results ☐
- Prepare questions. Questions deserve a ☐
  section of their own. So, here goes...

Picture yourself in a room, facing an interviewee for a Basket weaving position.

You: So I see you went to a great school for four years.
Interviewee: Yes
You: And you have a degree in Basket weaving.

Interviewee: Yes.
You: (uncomfortable laughter) Well, haha, it's a good thing we are hiring a basket weaver.
Interviewee: (only laughs because you're laughing) Yes, haha, it is.
You: So, do you have experience with baskets?
Interviewee: Yes, not only did I get the degree, but I also interned with the Picnic Firm. They specialized in basket production.
You: Oh that's very interesting.
Interviewee: Yes, and if you had read my resume, you would have known that.
You: True… but my my, that's quite an attitude you've got there. I'm not hiring you.
Interviewee: That's fine, I wouldn't want to work for you anyway. I'm only interested in people who are serious about their baskets.

The above is exactly what will happen if you go in to the interview unprepared, asking obvious, close-ended questions. Asking the right questions will give you the answers you need to make a decision.

What are the right questions?

They:
- Don't discriminate.
- Are open-ended.
- Are relevant to the position
- Are relevant to the individual

Don't discriminate:
You may not discriminate on the basis of: arrest record, sex/gender, pregnancy, age (if 40 or older), religion, color, race, national origin, citizenship, disability, military service during the Vietnam-era. For example, asking someone's age is discriminatory. Asking when someone graduated from high school is also discriminatory, because it makes it easy to identify the individual's age.

Open-ended:

If someone can answer your question with a "yes" or "no," your question is not helpful. Yes or no answers do not provide you with useful information. You need questions that produce content-full dialog to help you get a better idea of the person's past experience.

Example: I see on your resume that you have taken a class in basket weaving. Tell me about a project you worked on for the basket weaving class that you learned a lot from.

Why is this example fantastic? The response will reveal what was involved in the class AND what the individual got out of the class AND thus suggest what more said individual can bring to your basket weaving team. If you're as smart as I think you are, you will also glean more information about the individual based on his/her enthusiasm about the question. "Well I didn't learn much from the class…" may suggest said individual is rather dull. "Well, the assignment was to design a basket that is light, roomy, and festive,

and I added an additional requirement: insulated. As you know, it is quite hard to balance the insulated requirement with the light AND festive, so I used a material the professor had mentioned a couple weeks earlier. Anyway, I still have the basket in my room and used it for a picnic yesterday! The project helped me apply information given to me, build a product, and add my own goal as well to create something I can be quite proud of." Such an answer may suggest the individual is awesome... and ends sentences with prepositions.

Example: Tell me about a time you overcame some kind of hurdle. Please tell me what the hurdle was, and how you went about solving the problem.

This example is also fantastic because you again get a narrative that will shed some light on how this person copes with challenges. We all face challenges, whether it is a poorly written TPS report, a sadistic mother-in-law, or even a lazy employee. The answer will help you determine how this particular individual approaches different projects.

Example: Do you know about how to implement project designs using C++?

This example is horrible!!! It's a yes or no question. I wanted to make sure you were paying attention.

Example: How would you implement a project design using C++?

This example is awesome, especially coming from someone who knows what a good answer would be. This sort of technical question will provide you a lot more insight into an individual's knowledge, skill and possibly resourcefulness. Again, this question is most helpful if you have some idea as to what a positive answer would be. Ideally, it would be best for the person who knows enough to answer the question to actually ask the question. After

engaging your interviewee with dialogue about the task, you will have a much better grasp of how knowledgeable your interviewee is. This also gives your interviewee a chance to bring her/his résumé to life.

Applicable to the Position:
Make sure all questions you ask are applicable to the position. For example, "There is a requirement to be over 25 years old to rent condos for visiting ambassadors. Can you meet this requirement?" is a fair question to ask of someone applying for a position that involves hosting foreign government officials.

Relevant to the individual:
Read resumes. Stick to the position and the person involved. Asking about another company's procedures will not provide you insight into the applicant's ability to perform a task. However, asking the applicant how they responded to procedures will.

A good rule of thumb is to have at least four questions for each of your expected results. Once you feel you have developed more than enough fair questions to guide the interview in a direction that will provide you thoughtful insight into the applicant's qualifications, you are ready to hold the interview.

Conduct the Interview

This section is short. If you have followed all of the instructions for preparation, your interview will go quite smoothly. Greet the candidate, explain the schedule for the day, talk about the position, and ask the questions.

Request questions or concerns. Take notes. Be prepared to address questions or concerns. Take notes. Ask open-ended questions. Take notes. You know

all this; we've been over it. Just be sure to focus on the candidate's responses. Take notes. Some people get nervous, so again, be sure to judge responses rather than behavior.

Go get 'em, Tiger! Take notes.

At the end of the interview, again ask the candidate if they have any questions. Review what you have talked about. Let the candidate know what happens next and when it will happen: "I'll give you a call a week from today after we have conducted our other interviews."

Also, thank the candidate for applying and interviewing. It is the polite thing to do.

However, refrain from insinuating any kind of outcome. You do not want to be misleading, so in this case, do not lead at all.

Evaluation

You took notes. I hope they were good notes. You are going to use these notes to make the most important decision of all: who to hire.

Whip out your list of required tasks, skills and competencies.

Whip out your notes.

Now look carefully at each item on your task list. Rate each item on your task list according to how well you feel the candidate could meet the results.

Now go down your task list, and rate each item according to how well the candidate responded to questions that related to items on the task list. Review each item on your task list independently.

In review, consider:
- Work experience and education
- Motivation
- Ability to perform the tasks
- Input from others
- Reference/background check results

Complete your evaluation carefully, as the future of your team's success rides on how well you assess your candidates. As difficult as it may be, try to avoid factoring appearance, or first impressions into your assessment. You want to hire the most qualified individual, not the most charming interviewee.

BACKGROUND CHECK

You've picked your top choice. You really need to do some sort of background check as well. It is very important to know who you are hiring.

There are, of course, ways to preclude shady characters from applying for a position in your esteemed group. Make it clear from the very beginning that you conduct rigorous background and drug checks on all employees. Asking potential hires to sign daunting forms permitting background checks will also ward off most people who may have skeletons in their closet.

So, call references. Know who you are hiring.

EXTEND OFFER

Finally this guide has come to an end,
And a job offer you can now confidently extend.

Whether a probation period to test the fit
Or a full time offer with a benefits kit,

Your candidate is well on the way
To joining your team to work for pay.

And if that person turns you down
Avoid a crease, wrinkle or frown

Instead extend the offer to your next of choice
Remember the candidate also has a voice.