Hard versus Soft Skills

By Harris M. Plotkin

It is important to be able to measure and evaluate both the Hard and Soft Skills of an applicant in order to make a good hiring or promotion decision. In addition to helping you get the right person into the right job, it will also reduce turnover and employee theft, and increase employee retention.

What are Hard Skills? Hard Skills are the technical knowledge needed to do a job. Hard Skills are the cumulative product of experience, training, and education. Typical examples are: operate a cash register, make an omelet, mow a fairway, make a Long Island Iced Tea, know how to set a table, and know how to serve a table. What are Soft Skills? Being sensitive to the needs of others, wanting to be of service to others, being courteous, being appreciative, being a hard worker, being dependable, and being honest. Soft Skills are the combined product of a person's aptitude and their values.

To evaluate Hard and Soft Skills you must truly understand the type of person you need for each job in your organization. Therefore, you must identify the core competencies needed for each job. Just writing a job description wouldn't quite do it. You need to evaluate each task in the job description and determine what type of skills, education, training, or experience would be necessary to do that task, and do that for each and every task in the job description. The results would be the Hard Skills portion of the core competencies.

You also need to go through each of those tasks in the job description and determine what kind of Soft Skills would be needed to make that person successful in that job. That would be their attitude, ability to handle rejection, dependability, patience, honesty, persistence, intelligence, and other important factors.

Most of our 33 years have been spent designing hiring processes for organizations with from five to over 20,000 people. Our main goal is to design a cost effective hiring process where you do the least expensive, most accurate step first. Whether it is reading resumes and/or, employee applications, doing phone interviews, administering Honesty, Attitude, Aptitude, Personality, or Skill tests, running background checks, or checking references. Most important of all of those steps is to do the one that will knock out some people immediately to save you time and money.
This is fairly easy to do, and we have been quite successful over the years helping companies do this. What has been difficult to do, is to get companies to analyze their jobs in **sufficient detail** to help us **identify** the **Hard and Soft Skills** that are necessary to be successful in a job.

Recently, assessments have been developed that enable any employer to simply fill out a questionnaire on a computer with the end result being a definition of all of the core competencies or just the Soft Skills necessary to be successful in a job. This is one of the most interesting, innovative assessments we have seen. It will help our clients do a much better job of selecting people who will not only be **capable of doing a particular job**, but also of fitting in with the **culture** of the organization. This will help in **reducing their turnover** and **increasing the retention** of their top people.

However, saying that and convincing our clients to do so, is always difficult. Why? Because most of their time is spent trying to find people, and then interview them as fast as possible so that they can hire them to meet short-term goals. **Meeting short-term goals doesn't mean you are meeting long-term goals.** Short-term goals can solve an immediate problem, but can **create serious long-term problems** like employee theft, high turnover, lower productivity, negligent hiring lawsuits, and reducing the effectiveness of the team.

What is really important in making somebody successful? Five factors:

1. Their **attitude**;
2. Their **aptitude** for the job;
3. Their **education** or **training**;
4. Their **experience**; and
5. Most important, their **compatibility with the culture** and values of the organization.

Interviews alone won't get it done. Reference checks won't get it done. Neither will tests, but using them all in a well thought out hiring process will get it done. But the effort must be up front. If an organization truly wants to save turnover costs, then they have to concentrate on selection.

In retail, it's location, location, location. To be successful in Building A Winning Team, it is **SELECTION, SELECTION, SELECTION**. Remember, no one can "turn a frog into a prince", no one. You have to hire the prince.

*About the author... Harris (Hank) Plotkin is the author of Building A Winning Team, and creator of the ABOVE and BEYOND customer service training program designed exclusively for the club industry. He is the founder of The Plotkin Group,*
a 33-year-old management consulting and training firm which uses the latest scientific employee testing and training programs to help organizations select and train employees. They have several hundred clients in the golf industry, including many golf management companies, numerous resorts, private country clubs, and municipal clubs. Their ABOVE and BEYOND customer service training program is approved by the PGA of America and the CMAA for continuing education credits. Mr. Plotkin travels around the country training PGA sections and CMAA chapters in that program, as well as their BUILDING A WINNING TEAM and TAKING THE GUESSWORK OUT OF HIRING workshops. For more information call The Plotkin Group at (800) 877-5685, or Fax: (760) 603-8570, or E-mail: buytests@plotkingroup.com.