LIFETIME, INTERACTIVE BUSINESS GUIDE
A TEN-BOOK SERIES ON TOP BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

WIN @ BIZ®

Hire The Right People

KNOW WHAT THE WINNERS DO!

Growth & Business Coach

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WIN AT BIZ®

HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

A TEN E-BOOK SERIES

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HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

A company's most important asset is a human one. Its value is in the sum total of its people: their talents, creativity, knowledge, ambition, common business sense, morals, and ethics.

If a company is comprised of the group of workers at its heart, then their productivity is going to determine its profitability, growth rate, and success. By definition, productivity is the rate at which goods or services create economic value. Now do the math. The more goods or services you produce per hour of labor expense, the more economic value is created for your company. The greater the economic value, profitability, and financial opportunity, the bigger the benefit to everyone involved in the company.

To have a competitive edge in the marketplace, a company must be productive in every phase of its business. Your producers are everyone: the clerical and customer service staff, sales department, back room production staff, outside service people, shipping and receiving staff, and management. All must have consistent productivity. How do you build a company of people where everyone is productive and creating economic value?

This e-book will focus on the skills you need to find and hire a winning team. Successful leaders of growth-oriented companies know that building a productive, competitive company requires hiring practices that search for the right people. Once you hire the right people, you must then develop business process systems to train and motivate both the employees and their supervisors for productivity. (Training and motivational business processes are discussed in Book 4 of the Win at Biz series, *Develop Efficient Business Processes*.)

Productivity does not just happen. It is part of the culture that starts at the top of an organization and is turned into action via disciplines and efficient business processes that create excellent hiring, training, and motivational programs. Furthermore, every hire you make is representing your company, the company's customers, its reputation, and your investment. To have the best company, you must employ the best people. The following information will get you started in the right direction toward developing a successful recruitment program.

Hiring Mistakes Are Costly

Take a second to add up the real costs that are involved in placing the wrong person in the wrong position—including the cost of advertising, the interviewing process of several candidates, the training costs, and the salary and benefits of the new employee for the number of months employed. In addition to the real costs are all of the hidden costs, including the loss of productivity incurred by placing the wrong person in the position, missed opportunities, dissatisfied customers, loss of competitive advantage and the negative effects that a low producer has on the morale of the other employees.

Remember, coworkers will spot a poor hire very quickly. In short, good hiring processes bring economic value to your business. Poor ones sap your company's finances, goodwill, and energy.

Surprisingly, even though poor hiring decisions are such a drain on a company's bottom line, many companies do not invest the time into planning effective interview processes or properly training and preparing their interviewing managers to conduct positive searches.

Win at Biz Scorecard

Measure the actual costs of each hire to gain a better understanding of the consequences of a bad hire. Accomplish this by recording the actual costs that are incurred with each new hire.

14 Common Hiring Mistakes

The following is a list of the most common hiring mistakes that can undermine your hiring process.

1. Not predetermining what specific talents, skills, knowledge, behaviors and motivators you need to conduct an effective search for a top performer.
2. Failing to prepare a well-thought-out, written hiring plan or process.
3. Failing to develop an informative and accurate list of questions for candidates.
4. Not pre-screening candidates for required knowledge, experience, and salary expectations. Pre-screening will save your company time and money.
5. Failing to prepare the candidate with information about the company and details of the job description prior to the interview.
6. Hiring people whose viewpoints, style, and personality are too similar to your own.
7. Raising the qualifications for the position to unrealistic standards. This approach can lead to hiring people who are overqualified for the position, leading to boredom and lackluster performance.
8. Not requiring each candidate to interview with two or three supervisors.
9. Relying on only the interview itself to select your candidate, rather than using several different methods of evaluation.
10. Not introducing more "do and observe" methods into the interview evaluation process. (For instance, walking the candidate through the company and asking specific questions about tasks that are taking place. "How would you improve the productivity or quality of this process?" Also consider observing the candidate learning a new task to see if he or she is a quick learner.)
11. Not having a rating process in place to subjectively evaluate and differentiate the various candidates.
12. Not checking references or background history thoroughly.
13. Not developing a large enough pool of good candidates.
14. Making a hiring decision too quickly.

Use the Right Search Process

The first area of a successful hiring process is to commit a well-thought-out, effective plan to paper. These written processes will become the hiring systems that will allow your human resources department or supervisors to become more consistent at hiring for productivity.

A good hiring process will find the right candidates, ensure intelligent hiring decisions without guesswork, and match the right candidate to the right position. This effective hiring process includes

- writing a job description,

- determining what qualifying factors will lead to success,

- developing questions to uncover those success factors,

- objectively rating each candidate,

- outlining a step-by-step interview plan, and

- completing a reference and background check.

As you work through these steps, you may also want to check out *How to Choose the Right Person for the Right Job Every Time,* by Lora Davila and Louise Kursmark, as a helpful guide.

Win at Biz Scorecard

Start building a more effective hiring process today!

Start by Defining the Job Description

In order to determine what success factors you are looking for in a candidate, it will be necessary to define the job position. Start by defining the *purpose* of the position in one or two sentences. Next list the *job duties* and primary responsibilities that this position will require. Give a complete description of the *performance outcomes* that this person will be required to deliver. See Exhibit A for a helpful aid in developing an accurate job description.

Job Description

Job title: Retail furniture sales manager

Purpose: To lead the sales staff in developing a superior level of sales and customer satisfaction relative to the competition while also personally generating sales.

Job duties: Take turn with other sales people to sell on the sales floor while also managing the sales staff. Management duties would include the training of product knowledge and sales skills, supervision and delegation of sales duties, maintaining sales tools, handling customer complaints, creating a positive work environment.

Performance outcomes: Meet of exceed monthly and annual sales targets with a high level of customer satisfaction.

Win at Biz Scorecard

Have you defined a written job description for each position within the company?

Determining the Qualifying Success Factors for Each Position

From the job description outline you have prepared, you then determine what success factors will qualify a candidate for the job. The four categories for which you will measure competency are talents, technical skills and knowledge, performance skills, and the motivational work environment.

To be successful at hiring productive people, you will need to understand the importance of identifying and searching for *talents*. I encourage you to read *First, Break All the Rules*, by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. The book offers excellent ideas for achieving higher levels of performance by selecting people on the basis of their talents. The point is that talents are considered more important than skills or knowledge—because job-specific skills and knowledge can be taught, whereas talents cannot. Talents are what an individual is wired to do.

Everyone experiences and perceives the outside stimuli of the world differently. Talents are unique patterns of thoughts, feelings and behavior that a person enjoys repeating often. That is why we label people as planners, list-makers, problem-solvers, mechanically inclined, artistic, or people-persons. Generally if a person is passionate about his or her job it is because talents align with the job duties being performed.

Generally wherever one's passions lie, so do their inner talents. It is for this reason that when you hire people who are passionate about their work, they will undoubtedly be more productive. For example, the skills of an accountant would be understanding arithmetic; an accountant's knowledge comprises learning double-entry bookkeeping. But for an individual to be wired as a successful and productive accountant, he or she must experience positive feelings when working with numbers, problem solving, and balancing the books. If a person's talents are aligned with a customer service

position, he or she would experience rewarding feelings every time he or she satisfies an angry customer. The same positive feelings must arise every time a professional salesperson closes a deal, or a repairman fixes something. These feelings of satisfaction and pride of workmanship come only from inner talents and passions.

Examples of the required *technical skills and knowledge* may include understanding a specific software program, possessing knowledge about a certain product or industry, having completed a specific course of education such as interior design or architecture, having demonstrated a high proficiency in salesmanship, and possessing specific knowledge and licenses, such as those required to sell insurance or real estate.

Performance skills are behavior-based skills that will be required to perform the job. For example, a manager who is responsible to supervise and motivate others must possess good listening behavior, a salesperson would need a persistent behavior, and a customer service representative handling complaints would need behavior that exhibits patience and tolerance for stress. Every job description will require specific behavior skills that you will need to identify in order for your interview plan to help you find a good match. A sample list of additional behavior skills would include the following:

- flexible
- good time management
- planner
- goal driven
- risk taker
- encourager
- caring
- energizer
- problem solver
- resourceful
- persuasive
- good communicator
- organizer
- logical
- independent
- self-starter
- good empathy skills

- detail oriented
- takes initiative
- high integrity
- creative
- determined
- ambitious
- good listener
- high stress tolerance
- patient
- honest
- delegator
- persistent
- conscientious
- courteous
- friendly
- respectful
- responsible

Motivational work environment preferences are extremely important to identify, as they are the number one reason for people leaving their job. Examples of a motivational work environment may be found in a person who prefers achieving the desired outcome through a team effort rather than accomplishing the task alone. Another example may be a candidate who prefers working for compensation that is performance-based versus receiving a fixed salary. Or possibly the work environment offers job duties that are very redundant; this would eliminate a candidate who prefers a wide variety of work. It will be important to identify these work environment preferences so your interview process searches for a candidate who is a good match.

See Exhibit B for a helpful aid in determining these four success factors for your available position.

Exhibit B

Qualifying Success Factors

Job title: Retail furniture sales manager

Talents: Enjoys working with color and fabrics, enjoys finding solutions to clients decorating challenges, enjoys educating and teaching others, thrives on organization and detail

Technical skills and knowledge: Interior design education, retail furniture sales experience, knowledge of window treatments, customer service experiences, training and motivational experience.

Performance skills: Listening, attention to detail, initiative, treats others fairly, customer focus and interest, delegation, integrity, follow-up, organizing, time management, communication skills, persistence, logical presentation of information, patience, self-starter.

Motivational work environment: Enjoys working indoors with co-workers who may be in a competitive wage relationship. Can move around and work on his or her feet most of the day. Desires to derive a portion of income from sales commissions or sales production bonuses. Is available to work evenings and weekends.

Win at Biz Scorecard

Have you determined the qualifying success factors for each position?

Use the Right Interview Questions

Let me guess: When you think of interviewing, you think of the questions, right? What you are learning, though, is that good questions are only as good as the process you've used to get a candidate in front of you. Assuming you've broadcasted an accurate job description, and decided what qualities your ideal candidate must possess, only *then* can you design the questions.

Remember, you are looking for specific answers: ones that reveal competencies and useful information. The three styles of questions we will discuss are traditional, situational, and behavioral. You may mix the various styles to uncover each candidate's traits and competencies in your search for a good match.

Traditional questions are open-ended, groundbreaking questions aimed at getting to know the candidate better. Traditional questions may or may not help the interviewer get to know if the candidate is a good match for the position. Often candidates will simply offer well-rehearsed answers that do not give a real picture of his or her true competencies. Examples of traditional questions would be, "What is most important to

you in the workplace?" or, "Tell me about your biggest career accomplishment," or, "Why do you wish to work here?"

Situational questions are also open-ended questions, but they require the candidate to formulate an answer to a hypothetical situation. These questions usually start out with, "Give me an example of how you would…" or, " What would you do if…?" or, "How would you handle the situation if…?" An example of a situational question would be, "How would you handle a situation where a deadline for a project is due in a few days and your team is running behind schedule?" Situational questions test the candidate's thinking and tell you what the person *may* do if this situation were to arise.

Behavioral questions are designed to get information about specific past performance. If you can uncover past performance, you can predict future performance. Questions are constructed to uncover specific human traits and competencies for which you are searching. In order to develop the most effective behavioral questions, the interviewer must pose questions that reveal a real-life, job-related experience. The experience needs to relate to a specific competency. Request the situation in which the experience took place, the action the candidate took, and the results of the action.

Behavioral questions usually start out with, "Describe for me a situation where you were…" or, "Tell me about a time when you were…". Behavioral questions will require the interviewer to ask several follow-up, probing questions. These probing questions might be, "How did you handle the situation?" or, "What did you do or say in that situation?" and, "What were the results of your action or decision?" An example of a behavioral question would be, "Give me a specific example of the most difficult bad debt you had to collect that was over 120 days past due.

Examples of Traditional Questions[1]

1. How were you able to stay so long (so short) at your previous job?
2. What is most important to you in the workplace?
3. Tell me about your responsibilities growing up?
4. At what age did you begin working?
5. Tell me about any volunteer work you have done.
6. Tell me about new responsibilities you have taken on as your career has progressed.
7. What is your biggest career accomplishment?
8. What was the least appealing (or most appealing) to you in your last job?
9. Why do you wish to work here?
10. Tell me about which subjects you enjoyed most (or least) in school.
11. How many hours a week are you accustomed to working?
12. Tell me about any conflicts you have had with coworkers or management? How did you resolve them?

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[1] Questions 28–43 and 54–55 are taken from *How to Choose the Right Person for the Job Every Time*, by Lori Davila and Louise Kursmark (McGraw–Hill 2004). Questions 44–53 are taken from *96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before You Hire*, by Paul Falcone (AMACOM 1996).

13. Explain your understanding of this job's responsibilities.
14. What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
15. What beliefs do you hold deeply as a result of your life experiences?
16. What plans do you have for self-improvement and personal development?
17. What kinds of things do you learn quickly?
18. What kinds of things do you find difficult to learn?
19. How do you plan your day?
20. What would you like to do on Monday morning if you could choose?
21. What do you enjoy doing most in your free time away from work?
22. What types of work do you find most (or least) rewarding?
23. What do you do best in the workplace?
24. What gives you satisfaction in the workplace?
25. What are your five-year career goals?
26. Why would you be successful in this position?
27. What would your previous supervisors say about you?
28. Why do you want to work for us?
29. Do you work well under pressure?
30. Do you consider yourself a leader or a follower?
31. Do you work well in teams?
32. Do you prefer a structured or loose working environment?
33. What will your coworkers say about you?
34. What will your subordinates say about you?
35. Define your leadership or management style.
36. Describe your decision-making style.
37. How do you evaluate success?
38. What are your views on continuing education?
39. What have you done to improve your professional skills this year?
40. What are you looking for in a new opportunity?
41. What will you bring to this position that another candidate will not?
42. How long do you expect to stay with our company?
43. What are you compensation requirements?
44. Tell me about your greatest strengths (or weaknesses).
45. What was your favorite (or least favorite) job position?
46. What makes you stand out among your peers?
47. What has been your most creative achievement?
48. What would your past supervisor say makes you most valuable to them?
49. What areas of skills do you need to improve upon in the next year?
50. How do you approach your work from the standpoint of balancing your career with your personal life?
51. How have you added value to your past jobs?
52. What does personal growth mean to you?
53. What type of work environment do you work in best, one that is structured with specific directions or less structure with more room for creative thought?
54. How would you describe your ideal position?
55. How would you describe your ideal supervisor?

Examples of Situational Questions[2]

1. If you had a subordinate who was consistently late for work, what action would you take?
2. If you had a team member who was not contributing, how would you deal with it?
3. If you had a communication problem with a supervisor, what would you do?
4. If there was a company policy wit which you disagreed, how would you handle it?
5. How would you react if you were asked to do a task outside of your job description?
6. If you were in a stressful situation, how would you react?
7. What would you do if you became aware of a coworker's personal problems and it was affecting his or her productivity?
8. When you are in a situation where you have to deal with a company's shortcomings, how do you deal with it?
9. If you were to work for this company, what type of corporate culture would you create?
10. How would you react if you had your job redefined to meet the changing needs of the company?
11. If I told you that this position has growth potential, what does that mean to you?
12. If you were not getting along with a coworker, how would you deal with the situation?
13. If you had an uncompleted project that was now due, how would you handle the situation?
14. If you were aware of dishonest actions by a coworker, what would you do?
15. If you were offered a financial incentive, how would that motivate you?
16. If you were confronted with an unhappy customer, how would you react?

Examples of Behavioral Questions

1. Give me an example of a time when you compromised on one of your most basic principles and it backfired on you. How did you correct the situation? What were the results?
2. Tell me about a large-scale change that you faced. How did you handle it? How did it turn out?
3. Tell me about a project where you had to be very disciplined and persistent to complete the task successfully. How long did it take you? What obstacles did you face? How did you overcome them? What were the final results?
4. Give me an example of a project that was initially unsuccessful but at which you ultimately succeeded. Why did it fail? What corrective actions did you implement? Why did it ultimately succeed?
5. Tell me about a specific situations where you generated ideas to increase your company's revenue (or decreased your department's operational expenses).What did you do? What difficulties did you encounter? What were the results?

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[2] Questions 1–7 are taken from *How to Choose the Right Person for the Job Every Time*, by Lori Davila and Louise Kursmark (McGraw–Hill 2004). Questions 8–11 are taken from *96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before You Hire*, by Paul Falcone (AMACOM 1996).

6. Tell me about a time when you had to reinvent yourself to succeed at a task or project. What did you change? What were the results?
7. Every company has some shortcomings; give me an example of a company dysfunction with which you have had to deal in the past. How did you handle it? What happened?
8. Give me a specific example of a time when you worked with a very angry customer. How did you handle it? How did the complaint get resolved?
9. Tell me about a project in which you were the leader of others who were working together to accomplish a specific goal. What were your most successful leadership tactics? What were the final results?
10. Give me a specific situation in which you successfully sold your viewpoint.
11. How did you proceed with changing the thinking of others? What were the final results?
12. Tell me about any type of work problem you have had to solve; how did you go about it?
13. Tell me about one of the most difficult supervisors under who you have had to work; describe how you adapted to the situation.
14. Tell me about one of the biggest changes at work you have had to accept and how you adapted to it.
15. Tell me about a project at work where your self-confidence allowed you to tackle the project when others shied away.
16. Tell me about a project at work where your attention to detail made the difference between success and failure.
17. Tell me about a longer term project to which you committed yourself and the difficulties you experienced completing the project.
18. Tell me about a dispute or disagreement you have encountered with a coworker, how did you resolved it?
19. Give me an example of where you have had to use listening skills to be successful.
20. Tell me about a project where you had to depend upon the teamwork of your coworkers to complete it.
21. Give me examples of how you have learned to manage your time to maximize productivity.
22. Give me an example of a time you were responsible to set the goals and develop the plan of actions to obtain the goal.
23. Tell me your determining factors of how you take a list of tasks that need to be completed and prioritize the tasks.
24. Tell me about an experience where you have had to make a presentation in front of a group of people.
25. Tell me about the most stressful work situation that you have incurred.

As you develop your own behavioral questions, remember to formulate the follow-up questions:

- "What did you do?"

- "How did you handle that situation?"

- "What action did you take?"

- "What happened?"

- "What were the results?"

- "How did people react?"

- "Why do you think you failed (or succeeded)?"

It is the answers to these follow-up questions that will give the interviewer insight into the candidate's behavior.

Once you have developed the corresponding questions aimed at uncovering the successful competencies you have identified for the new hire to be productive, insert the questions into your competency chart under each competency for which you are searching. (You can also use this form to record the candidate's answers to each question.) It will allow you to compare apples to apples once you've finished interviewing all the candidates. See Exhibit C below; this example chart includes questions and space for applicant's answer. For simplification, there is only one success factor listed under each category, though you will craft a more comprehensive evaluation form for your candidates.

Exhibit C

Job title: Retail women's clothing sales manager

1. Talents: Enjoys working with colors and fabrics

   Question: Tell me about what you most enjoy when working with a client?
   Answer:

2. Technical skills and knowledge: Retail clothing sales experience

   Question: Tell me about the women's clothing manufacturers with whom you have conducted business?
   Answer:

   Question: Tell me what sales steps through which you lead a prospect to ultimately achieve your goal of a sale.
   Answer:

3. Performance skills: Listening

   Question: Give me an example of how you have utilized listening skills in the workplace to improve your success.
   Answer:

4. Motivational work environment: Must be able to work evenings and weekends

   Question: Tell me about a job where you were responsible to cover the sales floor evenings and weekends.
   Answer:

96 Great Interview Questions, by Paul Falcone, offers many valuable ideas to aid you in developing effective questions for both the interview candidates and their previous supervisors.

Win at Biz Scorecard

> Develop a quality list of behavioral style questions that will uncover the qualifying success factors for which you are searching.

Use the Right Interviewing Process

As in any business endeavor, planning and preparation will improve the end results. It is prudent to prepare an outline of your interview process. You'll project the company's professionalism to the applicant as well as ensure a good exchange of the required information, and ultimately facilitate a good employment match.

Tips for Conducting the Interview

- Make sure to set enough uninterrupted time aside to conduct the interview thoroughly.

- Conduct the interview in a quiet, private office with the door closed.

- Make the applicant comfortable with some personal chit-chat; feel free to reveal some personal information about yourself as well. Record your first impression of the applicant. Inform the applicant of the general interview format you will be conducting.

- Reveal some background information about the company. For example, reveal why and when the company was started. Explain what type of products or services you sell, describe your customer and what the competition looks like. Review both your price points relative to the competition and what your competitive advantage is in the marketplace. Explain the longevity of certain employees and the challenges the company is currently facing. Discuss the company's growth rate and the vision for the future. As we discussed before, you may want to update the candidate with this information prior to the interview.

- Reveal specific background information about the position, including the duties and responsibilities of the position along with performance outcomes and expectations.

- Discuss how this position fits into the bigger picture of the overall performance of the company. Again, you may want to reveal this information prior to the interview.

- Ask all of the different styles of questions that were discussed earlier in this e-book to help uncover the applicant's competencies. You may want to start with traditional questions for background information. Situational or "what if" questions are good predictors of experience levels and future actions. Well-thought-out behavioral questions will draw out previous life experiences and job-related behaviors to help determine a potential employee's abilities. It is important to develop a good list of job-specific behavioral questions that will reveal the applicant's talents, skills, knowledge, and experience so you can make a hire that will be productive. Be sure to let the applicant do the majority of the talking. Also inform the applicant that the situational behavior questions may require some

thought and if the answers are not readily available it will be possible to revisit the question later.

- It is always a good idea to take notes. Note-taking tells the applicant you are interested in his or her answers and will also help you to remember important information about the applicant when it is time to make decisions.

- Give the applicant ample opportunity to ask questions. Give thoughtful, detailed answers and encourage an open dialogue. Every time the applicant speaks you have another opportunity to learn more about how he or she thinks.

- Hold off providing any specific information about compensation and benefits until you have gathered more information about the applicant and you are sure he or she has a passion for the job and is a good match for the position.

- Take the time to sell the benefits of working for the company if you think the candidate has some potential.

- Be sure to have your finalists perform as many "do and observe" tasks as possible to give you a more hands-on evaluation method.

- Communicate the next steps of the interview process, let the candidate know when they can expect to hear from you.

Tips for After the First Interview

- Complete the rating forms from your notes as soon as the interview is complete, while the information is fresh in your mind.

- It is always a good idea to have a second interview before making a hire. A second interview provides yet another opportunity to ask more questions, learn more about one another and confirm that this hire will be a good fit.

- During a second interview, it is a good idea to review some of the more important information that has been discussed, including beginning compensation, current benefits, review periods, an outline of the job description and expected performance outcomes. It is especially important to put the agreed-upon compensation and benefits in writing so there are no uncertainties.

- It may also be a good idea to have one or two other people in the company, including the intended supervisor, interview the final top two or three candidates. Additional viewpoints will help to reduce hiring mistakes.

- If you are in doubt about the applicant being a good hire, wait and keep interviewing. The larger your pool of quality candidates the better person you will be able to hire. Remember, your company's production, reputation and investment are at stake.

Add "Do and Observe" Tasks to the Interview Process

Every interview must contain more elements than question and answer conversations. If you can, get the candidate out of the interview office and into the actual work environment. As you walk the candidate through the work environment, ask specific, work-related questions. Even better, arrange for the candidate to perform a job-related task. Observing a candidate performing an actual task will become one of your more accurate selection tools.

Make the Right Choice

It helps to have some type of formalized rating scale to fairly and accurately evaluate each of the candidates. Get in the habit of completing the rating chart as soon as the interview is completed and the information and impressions are fresh in your mind. Below is a sample rating chart based on the applicant's answers to your questions.

Rating Chart

For simplification we have listed only one success factor for each category

Applicants name: Tom Fischer

Job position: retail furniture sales manager

Talents: Rating

    Enjoys working with color and fabric   1   2   3

Technical skills and knowledge:

    Retail furniture sale experience   1   2   3

Performance skills:

    Listening skills   1   2   3

Motivational work environment

    Working evenings and weekends   1   2   3

Rating #1: Strong likelihood candidate possesses success factors
Rating #2: Possibly possesses success factors
Rating #3: Does not possess success factors (could not provide specific examples)

Win at Biz Scorecard

Do you have some type of subjective rating system to aid in the selection process?

Verify and Uncover an Applicant's Past History

It is prudent to always check an applicant's references, conducting thorough background checks and a variety of aptitude and drug tests. Multiple evaluations will increase your probability of selecting a person that will be a good match for the position, and who can deliver the job performance you are expecting.

When it comes to checking references, who better to speak to than the employee's past supervisors? Old bosses can share valuable information about job skills, experiences, and on-the-job performance. That said, getting a previous supervisor to open up and share information with you during a reference check can be challenging for fear of legal consequences. As with any conversation, start with a drop of honey to open up the channel of communication; a little flattery never hurts. For example, you could say something like, "John said some great things about your company and management style. In return, I was hoping you could give me some tips as to the best management approach to help John succeed with our company."

You will have more success obtaining information from a supervisor if you avoid routine job performance questions, instead asking more subjective questions that do not have a right or wrong answer. Attempt to compose your questions so the answers do not

need to focus on judging past performance, strengths, and weaknesses, but instead require an opinion regarding future actions relative to the candidate's abilities and experience. The following are a short list of sample questions:

- "What kind of management structure would you suggest that would allow John to excel in the role I have described?"
- "What would be the best approach to encourage John to take responsibility for tasks outside of his everyday job responsibilities?"
- "What would be the best communication approach to use to advise and correct John?"
- "Would our management style with John be more productive if we offered him more task-oriented jobs or more project-oriented ones?"
- "John will experience several changes in his job duties over the course of a year. What is the best approach to help John deal with change in his routine and last minute changes in his scheduling?"

Past employers or supervisors who are not willing to share information with you are possibly indicating there were problems with this applicant's employment. Typically a supervisor will be anxious to offer information about a well-liked previous employee. If you cannot obtain any information from previous employers, ask the applicant to obtain letters of recommendation from his or her previous employers. If previous supervisors cannot be found, request to see any annual performance reviews in their possession.

It is also important to conduct background checks. In order to hire the best candidate available, it is only practical to screen candidates for ones that have criminal backgrounds or who may have falsified information on their employment applications. When conducting your criminal search, do not rely solely on the information provided through the Internet, but also supplement your data from a competent background investigation firm. A basic search should be provided of the candidate's criminal history in all counties where he or she has lived for the past seven years, a motor vehicle report, social security verification, and a federal district court search.

Win at Biz Scorecard

Do you thoroughly investigate an applicant's references and personal history to eliminate hiring mistake? It only makes sense to know his or her proven track record.

Save Time without Sacrificing the Goal of Selecting the Best Applicant

The task of interviewing a flood of applicants can be a daunting job. When you expect a high volume of respondents to an advertisement, ask potential applicants to e-mail resumes (do not list the phone number in the ad). As the resumes arrive, e-mail a brief letter explaining the nature of the business and the pertinent details of the job description. Thank them for their inquiry and request in the letter that they contact you for an interview if they are interested in the position based upon what they have read. Generally, about two-thirds of the applicants will not respond after learning more about the position.

Next, only review the resumes of the applicants who respond and conduct pre-screening phone interviews with only those applicants who have favorable information on their resume. This procedure saves the time of fielding all of the telephone calls and reviewing all of the resumes. Additionally, you have eliminated all the applicants who were really not possibilities without having invested any time. Contacting candidates with favorable resumes by phone will further eliminate additional applicants. Be sure to train the person that will be doing the telephone pre-screening to utilize the competency chart. The objective of the pre-screening will be to search for abilities and traits that qualify the candidate for the competencies required for the position, validating them for an interview. Remember to ask the applicant to bring in written reports of past employment, including employer's names, phone numbers, compensation, a brief description of job duties and references.

Win at Biz Scorecard

How effective is your pre-screening program?

Never Stop Working to Improve Your Hiring Processes

To kick off your new and improved hiring process, take the time to develop written variations of all of the charts in Exhibits A, B and C. Invest time in having your interviewing team develop effective questions that will uncover the key competencies which you have identified for each position. Next, develop a written plan for an effective interview outline.

Once you have developed a complete interview process, you will need to have all of the participants included on your interview team practice by role play. The role playing should include an enactment of the entire interview plan with special attention given to the role playing of the questions as well as the follow-up questions.

In order to improve your hiring business process, be sure to record the resulting success of each new hire. Every time a hiring mistake is made, you should examine the interviewing process that took place, questions that were asked, what information was recorded and what vital information was missed. Then you can identify what went wrong and search for ways to improve the effectiveness of your hiring business processes.

Win at Biz Scorecard

Have you developed a format that encourages you to continue to improve your interviewing process?

Win at Biz Checklist

✔ **Have you developed a written interview format that is thorough, effective, and can be used as a business process by you or your managers to deliver productive hiring results?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Have you defined and completed a written job description for every position for which you may be hiring?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you use the job description to complete a written "qualification of success factors" form to aid you in a successful search?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Have you developed an effective list of open-ended questions to find applicants who possess the success factors for which you are searching?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Have you developed a written outline for an interview process?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you use a pre-screening procedure to save time in a hiring process?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you allow enough time to conduct an interview so that all the necessary information is exchanged?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you reveal adequate background information about the company and the job position for which you are interviewing?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you listen patiently and intently?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you take written notes and record the applicant's answers to the questions?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you use a "do and observe" procedure during the interview to improve your available information and selection process?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you complete a rating chart to help you review and select the best candidate?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you investigate the applicant's personal and employment history?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you get others involved in the interviewing process to gather additional opinions?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you put all the financial agreements in writing?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Do you wait to hire someone until you have found the right person for the position?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

✔ **Have you established a format for rating and improving the success of your hiring process?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

About the Author
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Entrepreneur, business mentor and growth coach, David Gabbert helps business professionals, business owners, new startups, and students learn how to win at business. Self employed for forty-seven years, founder and owner of four million-dollar-plus businesses, and author of ten Win at Biz® business books, Dave offers free business articles about a variety of proven business strategies which compose the basic building blocks of starting and operating a successful business.

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Win at Biz E-book and Workbook Series

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Book 3: Initiate Effective Financial Management Tools
Book 4: Develop Efficient Business Processes
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Book 6: Train for Productivity
Book 7: Motivate Your Employees
Book 8: Build a Successful Sales Organization
Book 9: Develop Effective Speaking and Listening Skills
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  - ✔ Developed from interviews with entrepreneurs who have founded businesses in the real world

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