



Your Guide to Launching a Successful Employment Testing Program

By Jon Haber, Senior Vice President, First Advantage Assessment Solutions

A well-conceived employee-screening program can help you reduce turnover, raise productivity, increase loyalty, and improve overall job satisfaction. Long used solely for employee selection, skills and behavioral testing has increasingly become a strategic tool for making critical organizational decisions about promotion, retention, training, downsizing and reorganization.

If you are thinking about implementing a skills or behavioral testing program in your organization, these seven rules of employee testing can help ensure your success:

Rule #1: Test for the job requirements

Testing must be job-specific. Most jobs require certain knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), and there are a variety of resources for determining what those are for any particular position. The Occupational Information Network (O*Net at <http://online.onetcenter.org/>) is just one of many online job-description databases and tools that can be used to find detailed descriptions of specific occupations.

Rule #2: Select the right KSAs

Each job requires certain KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities), but not every one of those can be measured or should be measured by testing. A call center position, for example, may require an understanding of the products being sold (knowledge), the ability to use a telephone system and/or computer-based customer-relationship management (CRM) system (skills), as well as a positive sales attitude and well-mannered phone presence (ability). Assessments, such as paper or computer-based tests on product features or computer-literacy skills, or a personality-profiling instrument on sales attitudes, can be used to measure most of these KSAs. However, certain KSAs (such as phone presence) might best be measured via observation of the candidate during role-playing or live sales calls.

Rule #3: Select the best means of measurement

Different types of KSAs should be measured with different forms of testing. For example, traditional *linear assessments* (i.e., assessments that contain traditional types of questions such as multiple-choice, matching or fill-in-the-blank items) measure specific knowledge and can be deployed either via paper, desktop computer or online. When

measuring skills, organizations have turned to *performance-based testing*, a form of testing that places people in a real-world environment or simulation and measures their abilities to perform specific tasks.

For example, multiple-choice questions are not the best way to determine a candidate's level of computer literacy. Computer literacy is best measured by asking the candidate to use actual software to perform specific tasks (such as starting programs, creating documents or working with databases).

Rule #4: Utilize valid testing instruments

Validity is the collection of evidence that demonstrates that a test actually measures what it purports to measure. Most companies providing tests or testing services sell assessments that are valid. Organizations creating assessments for internal purposes should at least ensure content validity by having custom assessments vetted by subject matter experts, ideally under the guidance of an industrial psychologist or other test-development professional.

Rule #5: Use scoring information appropriately and wisely

Testing is rarely the sole basis upon which hiring decisions are made. HR professionals should also be looking at interviews, resume review and reference checks as part of an overall profile of a job candidate. Psychological assessments can also generate suggestions for interview questions based on a candidate's response to items in a personality survey style assessment.

Rule #6: Implement testing in a non-discriminatory manner

When used appropriately, assessments can provide objective decision-making information, which can protect an organization from accusations of discrimination. The US Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC - <http://www.eeoc.gov/>) provides detailed guidelines for how to implement a non-discriminatory assessment process.

The barrier to proving discrimination in testing is relatively high. One must first show a statistically significant discriminatory outcome against a certain protected group based on race, age and gender, and then prove that a test or set of tests is specifically responsible for that outcome. Still, employers should be familiar with relevant EEOC guidelines to ensure fairness in all organizational decisions.

Rule #7: Take advantage of the latest testing technology

Advanced testing technology makes assessment easier and more effective than ever before. *Adaptive testing*, for example, is a dynamic form of testing that provides the maximum amount of information about a candidate's skill level in the shortest amount of time. *Bin-based testing* randomly draws questions from a large pool to create a unique

assessment each time a test is launched, making it an ideal form of testing for standardized tests or certifications. And *Internet-based test delivery systems* allow testing to take place in any location, enabling employers to pre-screen job candidates.

Employers who follow these seven simple rules of testing will find skills and behavioral assessments an invaluable part of their overall organizational development effort.