

## Of Rulers, Tape Measures...and Hiring

Would you measure someone for a nice suit with a ruler? Of course not. It's too short and rigid. A better bet would be a tape measure that would enable you to take all of the right measurements.

Too often organizations hire people the wrong way. They settle for pre-employment testing that works like a ruler instead of finding a good tape measure. Let's look at some ways to decide if the testing you use now, or are thinking about using, is a ruler or a tape measure:

- **Is it consistent?**

When you started using scissors, someone probably taught you the old rule, "Measure twice, cut once." Think the same way about testing. What is the seller's proof of reliability: Does their tool produce similar results each time? If they can't demonstrate that, how useful are the results? Be especially careful about the 10- or 20-question inventory that comes with lavish claims.

- **How accurate are the results?**

A good test should clear a second hurdle. The publisher should have documented evidence, called criterion-related validity, that their tool predicts success in relevant situations. Don't settle for testimonials or free trials. Ask for a written research report which shows that their test has predicted job success, and in more than one situation.

- **Can you tailor it?**

The most powerful tools are flexible. They allow you to choose the key personal qualities, often called traits or competencies, which lead to success in your organization. You can also focus on the most meaningful, job-related characteristics. If you can't tailor the test, is there hard evidence that it predicts success in your industry, or even better, in the general type of job you're filling? Anyone who offers you a short, one-size-fits-all test is likely selling you a ruler.

- **Does it have a manual?**

The ruler metaphor breaks down here, of course. A reputable publisher will have a technical manual, though. It describes how the test was developed, who was studied in the development research, the hard evidence for reliability and validity, and even statistics about results for different groups of people. If you aren't educated in testing, find a professional who is. He or she can help you wade through the technical language and tables.

- **Can you get false readings?**

Creating a good assessment is complicated. What works well with one group of people may not portray another as accurately. For example, some tests give different results for men and women, or across different race and ethnic groups. A reputable publisher has already checked for those possibilities, and reported what they found.

- **Is it in "horoscope language"?**

Some tests produce broad, general profiles: "She is outgoing and clever." Look instead for more specific, behavioral language that will help you visualize how a candidate might act: "She usually takes the initiative to meet new people." Look for nuances, too: "He is less energetic than most people." Good tests compare people to a database.

- **Will the seller answer technical questions?**

If a test publisher's representative is pressuring you to buy, without answering these important questions, keep looking. They may have no evidence to answer them. Or, even worse, they don't understand why you'd want to know.

Choosing the right pre-employment test takes time and some digging. A professional seller, though, will welcome your questions and take your buying decision as seriously as you do. They won't offer you a short, inexpensive ruler. They'll back up their claims, and help you find a good tape measure.