

HR INSIGHTS

Magazine

from the eyes of industry leaders

FINDING (AND KEEPING) HIDDEN LEADERS IN YOUR COMPANY



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How to Hire for Emotional Intelligence

Clash of the Generations: Managing the New Workplace Reality

Stop Screening Out Great Talent

5 Interview Questions Every Leader Should Ask

From The CEO

At The Resource we are passionate about our story and the stories of evolution our clients have to tell.



Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Hartung". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Kathy Hartung, CEO

THE RESOURCE

We like to say we are revolutionizing the way companies handle their greatest assets, their people. In practically every company in the US, the 80/20 rule still stands. You can *easily* identify your key employees, the cream of the crop. So often though, employees outside the top performing 20 percent get looked at as underperforming, when *really* it's just that they are in the wrong position.

The hiring landscape is continually changing, as CEO, I felt that in my own company. Companies needed a hiring system that is a standalone predictor of future performance.

The Core Hiring System reveals the kind of position a person is designed for based on their core unchanging nature, and then matches them to a position within a company where they *will be* a top performer. By optimizing the talent you have, and positioning you to only hire the right people, we are showing companies the effect of having a top performer in every seat.

We dig in with our clients to understand each position based on specific revenue generating tasks to create a Job Blueprint. Then we use The Core assessment to go beyond a person's skill, experience or even attitude and look at how they are hardwired to perform the tasks the position requires. We work alongside you to ensure that you only consider future top performers.

Our mission is a top performer in every seat, in every company.

From the CEO to the leadership team to the entry level position, a person doing what they are naturally designed to do has the power to rewrite the story; the story of your company, the story of your life.

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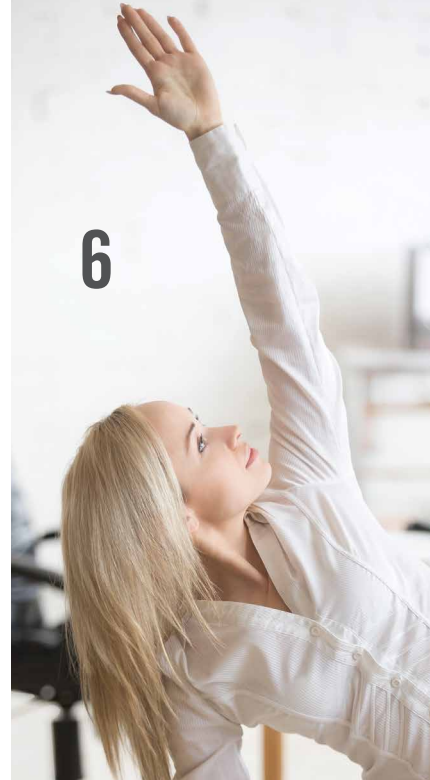
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FINDING (AND KEEPING) HIDDEN LEADERS IN YOUR COMPANY



Miscast and disengaged employees are a problem wherever they're found within an organization—especially when their ranks include middle managers, whose positions give them a great deal of influence over many other employees. A surprisingly high number of managers occupy such problematic positions: the Gallup Organization reports that 82% of managers are “miscast in their roles” and 25% of managers are “dangerously lousy.”¹ Clearly, this is a problem that must be addressed. So what can organizations do to better identify struggling managers and give them the support they need to be successful in their roles?

FIRST, UNLEASH YOUR MANAGERS

Even the most talented and engaged managers can experience frustration and be derailed off the path to success when they're given responsibility without also being given full authority. Without the ability to make decisions without asking someone else's permission, managers can't be effective leaders. And good managers won't stay with an organization if they aren't able to lead there.

To create a great culture in which managers thrive, follow the six-step plan presented by Tim Stevens in *Fairness Is Overrated: And 51 Other Leadership Principles to Revolutionize Your Workplace*. The first step is “Train them so their blood pulses with the mission, vision,

and values of the organization”; the other five emphasize offering whatever support you can to your managers—and letting them to be the leaders you (and they) expect them to be.²

NEXT, IDENTIFY NEW MANAGERS

Establishing a pipeline of new managers-in-waiting can keep your leadership bench strong and spur your company to new heights. Your organization is probably full of “hidden leaders” who are committed to their jobs and to the organization. In *The Hidden Leader*, Scott Edinger and Laurie Sain discuss four key characteristics that can help organizations identify hidden leaders within them:³

1. **They demonstrate integrity.** Hidden leaders have a strong ethical code of conduct that focuses on every employee's welfare. Their consistent adherence to their beliefs makes them predictable and dependable, and they have the courage to do the right thing even when it's difficult.
2. **They lead through relationships.** Hidden leaders get along with and value others. They lead and inspire because of who they are and how they interact with others and they don't depend on their position to influence the actions of others.
3. **They focus on results.** Hidden leaders maintain a wide perspective and act with independent initiative. They use the end to define the means, which can mean working outside of strict processes to achieve results. They aim for their goals and feel responsible and accountable for achieving them.
4. **They remain customer purposed.** Hidden leaders possess a big-picture awareness of how an action in a specific job affects the customer and a deep understanding of the customer value promised by the company.

Regardless of the quality of its product or its service, a company without strong leadership cannot succeed. Effective managers do more than oversee the work of employees: they also have a far-reaching influence on the organization as a whole. Therefore, companies should do all that they can to nurture their leaders—both the ones who are currently in management roles and the ones who have yet to be discovered. ■

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 2. Tim Stevens. 2015. *Fairness Is Overrated: And 51 Other Leadership Principles to Revolutionize Your Workplace*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, p. 118.
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IS “FLEXIBILITY” AT WORK OVERRATED?

BY ROBIN E. SHEA

In response to trends that favor less “traditional” work arrangements, more and more companies are giving employees the flexibility they prefer. But do employees really want that increased flexibility—especially if it comes at the expense of their wages? Two National Bureau of Economic Research scholars, Alexandre Mas (professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University) and Amanda Pallais (associate professor of political economy and social studies at Harvard University), answer that question in a paper titled “Valuing Alternative Work Arrangements.”¹

To gather their data, Mas and Pallais conducted an actual recruitment drive for a national call center, advertising in 68 high-population areas through a national job-search site. The 7,000 applicants were ethnically diverse and predominantly female, with an average age of 33. Half of them had attended college but had no degree; the other half was evenly divided between those who had only high school degrees and those who had college degrees.

The ads included “no information about the job’s schedule, location, or duration.” But when applicants clicked on the link to more detailed information, they were offered a choice between a standard Monday-through-Friday, 9-to-5 schedule and one of the following alternatives (chosen at random for each person):



1. Full-time (40-hour) flexible schedule set by employee; employee reports to company worksite in applicant's city
2. Full-time or part-time flexible schedule (up to 40 hours per week) set by employee; employee gets to determine number of hours worked as well as the schedule and reports to company worksite in applicant's city
3. Full-time, Monday–Friday, 9-to-5 schedule; employees can telecommute
4. Full-time or part-time flexible schedule set by employee; employee gets to determine number of hours worked and schedule and can choose whether to telecommute or to report to company worksite in applicant's city
5. Full-time, variable hours (which could include weekend and night work) set by employer at least one week in advance; employee reports to company worksite in applicant's city

But there was a catch: the two options didn't pay the same hourly rate. One paid a certain wage, and the other paid an amount (randomly determined) ranging from \$0 to \$5 less than that wage. There was no fixed correlation between a particular pay rate and a particular job. Sometimes the standard job had the higher wage, and sometimes it had the lower wage.

As one might expect, option 5—with no flexibility afforded to employees—was not very popular among the job seekers. Mas and Pallais found that “the average applicant [was] willing to take a 20% wage cut to avoid these jobs, and almost 40% of applicants would not take this [type of] job even if it paid 25% more

than a M–F, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. position.” But when faced with a choice between having alternative work arrangements or increased pay, what would applicants prefer?

Surprisingly, the study found that most people were *not* willing to take a cut in pay in order to have flexible schedules, even if they were able to set those schedules themselves. Mas and Pallais found that “the great majority of workers are not willing to pay for flexible scheduling relative to a traditional schedule: either the ability to choose the days and times of work or the number of hours they work.”

At the same time, though, a significant minority of applicants (mostly women with young children) *was* willing to take a pay cut to be able to work from home. Mas and Pallais found that, “on average, job applicants [were] willing to take 8% lower wages for the option of working from home.”

This study offers some valuable insight into employee relations and workplace management:

- Money is clearly a big deal. Money was never a small deal, of course, but in the past (when employment and the economy were more stable than they are now) employees often placed a high value on nonmonetary rewards and sometimes regarded good communication, perceptions of fairness, and lack of favoritism as more important than the pay. (Today's concept of “workplace flexibility” wasn't part of the vocabulary then.) This study indicates that money may be the biggest priority now, and perhaps even more so for young people entering the workforce.
- Work-life balance still ranks high in importance. But the traditional

Monday-through-Friday, 9-to-5, onsite work schedule may be a pretty good way to create and maintain it—without taking a hit to the wallet because of reduced wages associated with other options.

- Nobody likes variable schedules set by employers (with the possible exception of the employers, of course).
- Telecommuting continues to be popular with everybody, and especially with women who have young children.

The study by Mas and Pallais appears to turn many received notions on their heads. In particular, conventional wisdom has long held that employees value flexibility in their work arrangements more than anything else. Yet this study indicates that (under the conditions presented here, at least) this preference may be overstated. Employers would do well to investigate this subject further, in part to find ways to increase employee engagement by providing employees with the perks and benefits they truly value most. ■

Robin E. Shea has more than 20 years' experience in employment litigation, class and collective actions under the Fair Labor Standards Act and state wage-hour laws, defense of audits by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, and labor relations. She conducts training for human resources professionals, management, and employees on a wide variety of topics. She is editor in chief of the client publications for Constangy, Brooke, Smith, and Prophete LLP. She can be reached on Twitter at @RobinEShea.

1. Alexandre Mas and Amanda Pallais. 2016. “Valuing Alternative Work Arrangements.” NBER Working Paper No. 22708, scholar.harvard.edu/files/pallais/files/valuing_alternative_work_arrangements.pdf.

Stop Screening Out Great Talent

BY JON-MARK SABEL

As companies explore new ways to tackle new HR issues such as improving Millennial engagement and negotiating the gig economy (and its effect on building teams), they're also uncovering new solutions to the age-old problem of finding new talent. In particular, some are taking a closer look at how candidates interact with companies and modifying their application and hiring processes in response to those preferences. As a result, these organizations are finding talent that may have been overlooked by more traditional outreach methods.

HIRING IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

Molly Weaver, the talent acquisition director at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, decided to tackle the application process prevalent in the healthcare field. A traditional online application typically requires an applicant to create a personal profile before he or she can see relevant job openings, and the entire process can take over 30 minutes to complete. Also, application forms usually aren't mobile-optimized, even though around 40% of the hospital's job seekers conducted their searches on mobile devices last year. Weaver found that, when faced with an application experience that wasn't very applicant-friendly, 30% of job seekers exited the application before finishing it. She wondered if the Children's Mercy Hospital application process was so inconvenient and frustrating to applicants that it was causing the organization to miss out on the best caregivers for children who needed it most.

INTRODUCING "INTRODUCE YOURSELF"

First, Weaver examined the traditional hiring pipeline, which follows a predictable path: a candidate looks for job openings, fills out an application and submits it with his or her resume, attends two or more interviews, and (if all goes well) is finally offered the position weeks or months after the process started. Then Weaver had a novel idea: what if the first and second steps of that process were flipped?

Under her lead, Children's Mercy Hospital implemented a new application procedure called "Introduce Yourself." First, candidates introduce themselves to the organization via brief video introductions. Those who are deemed a good fit are then directed to the appropriate application. "Introduce Yourself" solves two of the main problems endemic to the traditional job application process:

- **The hiring process becomes much more personal.** The traditional job search leaves candidates feeling neglected: too often, submitted resumes seem to disappear into a virtual black hole, and candidates never hear from the organization again. Additionally, resumes can't adequately express personality, worldview, specific experience, and other factors that are essential for fulfilling the requirements of a position.
- **Employers can match candidates to jobs (instead of the other way around).** Most job postings are full of industry-specific jargon, making them incredibly difficult for the average candidate to navigate. In their mission to acquire gainful employment, most candidates will apply to any position for which they are remotely qualified (even if they have to trawl through countless irrelevant job descriptions). The "Introduce Yourself" program turns this process on its head by prompting candidates to reflect on their professional background and education. Recruiters can then use this information to match job hunters with the positions that seem the best fit for them.

So far this innovative hiring program has been a big success at Children's Mercy Hospital. For example, one of the first people to submit an application through "Introduce Yourself" had previously applied without success for more than fourteen other positions at the hospital. Because the traditional job listings were laced with jargon specific to the industry and to the organization, she had inadvertently applied for jobs for which she lacked the right qualifications. In her "Introduce Yourself" video interview, the job hunter revealed her interest in being a point of contact for patients and their families. Consequently, the hospital's HR department was able to match her to a position called "access representative" that she probably would not have found on her own.

NEXT STEPS

Reflecting on her own success in hiring innovation at Children's Mercy Hospital, Weaver identifies five steps that organizations can take to provide a better hiring experience for their applicants:

- **Don't wait to optimize the application and hiring process for mobile devices.** The Pew Research Center reports that "28% of Americans have used a smartphone as part of a job search, and half of these 'smartphone job seekers' have used their smartphone to fill out a job application"—and those numbers are increasing each year.²
- **Meet candidates where they are.** Feed your social media machine: create content and publish material that engages potential new hires. Then communicate with candidates via their preferred medium, be it e-mail, text, or social media message.
- **Pull back the curtain around recruiters.** Because they may be required to deliver bad news, recruiters are often afraid to engage candidates on a personal level. Keeping candidates at arm's length this way can decrease their engagement, though. So it is important to remove the curtain of anonymity surrounding the hiring process and give potential new hires insight into the lives of their employment liaisons.
- **Experiment with social media.** Use a variety of social media to engage with potential applicants. Don't overlook smaller social media platforms that aren't yet well known or financially successful—one of them could lead to a connection with the perfect hire.
- **Celebrate success.** Gala events aren't necessary; even small celebrations can have a huge impact. (To celebrate the 100th hire through "Introduce Yourself," Weaver bought ice cream for each employee who had come on board via the program.)

As Children's Mercy Hospital's "Introduce Yourself" program demonstrates, digital interviewing has enormous potential for innovation in hiring. The traditional hiring pipeline is an arduous process for both applicants and talent acquisition specialists. Combining new technology with a little outside-the-box thinking and a reconsideration of the usual hiring process can help an organization find great talent that might have been overlooked by traditional methods.

This article was originally published by HireVue (www.hirevue.com).

1. Figures provided by Molly Weaver.
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5 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EVERY LEADER SHOULD ASK

BY AMY ZIMMERMAN
AND JENNIFER RICHARD

The best candidates have qualifications that are more than skill-deep. It's difficult to discover these qualities during the interview process. But seeing past first impressions is crucial to hiring the right people—that is, people who have not only the skills, knowledge, and experience to do the job, but also the abstract qualities that will enable them to succeed in the organization's culture.

In some ways, the interview process has a lot in common with some of today's dating apps. Recruiters "swipe left" on candidates who seem incompatible with the organization because they lack the desired skills, knowledge, or experience. They "swipe right" on candidates who appear to meet the job requirements and have the potential to be a perfect match for the organization. Even after a candidate makes the first cut and advances to a smaller pool of candidates, the organization still needs to do more filtering to find someone who not only meets the general requirements, but also has that certain *je ne sais quoi* that makes him or her stand out from the crowd.

Because a company's culture is a reflection of the company's values, when an organization looks for and hires candidates who exhibit its values, the people it brings onto the team will be more likely to flourish within the organization. Of course, if recruiters want to discover these characteristics, they need to look beyond first impressions and give candidates opportunities to highlight their unique strengths. When asked during a final interview, the following questions can help hiring managers and recruiters understand how candidates think about themselves, how they think about others, and how they generally think through problems.

“WHAT ARE THREE NEGATIVE PERSONAL QUALITIES THAT SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU WOULD SAY YOU POSSESS?”

This question reveals a lot about a candidate's self-awareness. Organizations that value transparency often seek candidates who not only understand what their true negatives are but are also willing to admit them. Don't allow answers such as "I'm a perfectionist" or "I'm a workaholic" or other responses that are actually positives disguised as negatives. When candidates offer answers along those lines, ask them to try again. If they're stuck and can't come up with three negatives on their own, have them "phone a friend"—a partner or parent is usually a helpful source of information about someone's negative qualities!

“WHAT IS $\frac{3}{4}$ PLUS $\frac{1}{2}$?”

This question elicits some of the best responses. It isn't designed to test math skills (in fact, it's fine to let candidates use calculators or search online for the answer) but to offer insight into how candidates handle an unexpected question or situation. At most companies, the days are rarely predictable, and it's useful to see how candidates respond to curveballs. Do they panic? Blurt out a lot of wrong answers? Do they freeze and get stuck? Do they give up? Organizations need to know that the people they hire are resourceful, capable of thinking outside of the box, and quick on their feet.

“ON A SCALE OF 1 (LOW) TO 10 (HIGH), HOW WOULD YOU RATE HOW YOU FULFILL YOUR ROLE? AND IF YOU'RE NOT AT 10, WHAT PREVENTS YOU FROM HAVING THAT SCORE?”

This question, too, highlights a candidate's self-awareness. It also leads to discussions about professional growth and ambition. There's nothing wrong with humble confidence, but when candidates don't rate themselves as 10s, it's good for companies to know why—and to understand how those individuals plan to improve themselves.

“COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE: ‘MOST PEOPLE I MEET ARE _____.’”

An organization that values caring and teamwork need to understand how a potential team member views others. The only answer to this prompt that should be off limits is “interesting,” because it doesn't reveal any useful details and might actually be a euphemism for something negative. That answer is too open to interpretation and too vague to shed light on how a candidate thinks about and values other people.

“WHAT'S THE FIRST NAME OF SOMEONE WITH WHOM YOU WORK VERY CLOSELY?”

A candidate's ability to answer this question quickly (as well as follow-up questions about the colleague) can indicate that he or she is good at building relationships at work. The ability to work well with others goes hand in hand with being committed to an organization's community. Companies want to hire people who will take ownership not only of the products they create and offer but also of the environment and culture in which they work.

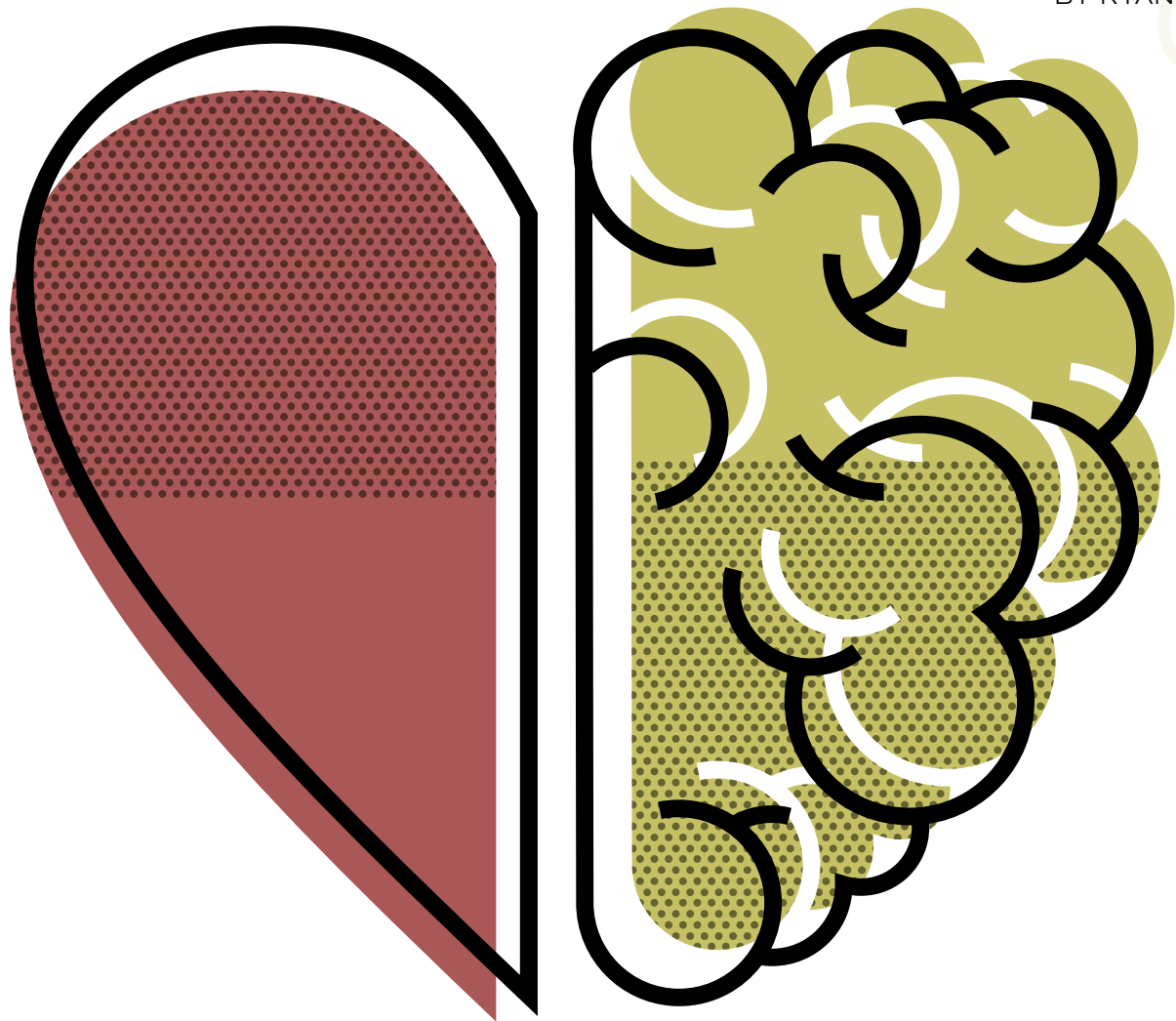
Interviewing is a crucial component of the hiring process that can give recruiters and hiring managers a peek beneath the resume and application form on the surface. Many people have the general skills and qualifications that a company seeks, but only a few will be the right fit with that organization and its culture. When a company develops and uses interview questions that shed light on how the candidate's values align with the organization's values, there's a much higher likelihood that a “swipe right” will turn into a successful relationship! ■

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How to Hire for

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

BY RYAN AYERS



Modern office environments require employees who are adaptable, clear communicators, good collaborators, and able to learn new skills quickly.

But few candidates possess all of these traits, which is why it can be tough for an organization to find the right team members, even if it is willing to invest in training. When hiring, instead of focusing too much on factors such as education and experience, organizations may benefit more by hiring new employees with high emotional intelligence. Tech companies (such as Google) are at the forefront of using this strategy to avoid making bad hiring decisions that can be costly for businesses, and other industries are starting to follow suit.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

The concept of emotional intelligence was originally introduced by psychologist Michael Beldoch in 1964 and was popularized three decades later in a book (titled *Emotional Intelligence*) by Daniel Goleman. Goleman wrote that emotional intelligence is generally high in individuals who have self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In other words, emotionally intelligent people can regulate their responses and actions, while being empathetic toward others and excelling in social situations. Their natural curiosity and knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses allow them to harness their abilities to help themselves and others grow and thrive.

WHY IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SO IMPORTANT IN THE WORKPLACE?

At first glance, emotional intelligence may look like a soft skill that's not very useful to a business. But the fact is that people with high emotional intelligence relate well to others, excel in a team environment, and are often adept at avoiding and resolving conflict—skills of value to almost any company. Companies that hire these people often enjoy a competitive edge: consultant Travis Bradberry points out that “90% of top performers have high emotional intelligence.”

Every company wants these star performers, but not all recruiters and hiring managers know how to find them. If you're feeling unsure about how to evaluate emotional intelligence, you're not alone. These strategies for detecting emotional intelligence in candidates can help you get started.

1. Create job descriptions that appeal to people with high emotional intelligence

You can't hire the right people if they don't apply. To address that concern, companies such as Adobe and Zappos have designed their application materials to appeal to their ideal candidates, using techniques such as relational processing to identify emotional intelligence.

2. Use initial screenings to refine your search

There's no reason to bring in a candidate who obviously lacks the qualities you want. During the phone interview, look for indications of high emotional intelligence, such as positivity, grace under pressure, and a tendency to define success by team accomplishments rather than by individual achievements.

3. Tailor your interview questions

Rather than rely only on the same, worn-out questions that most companies use, ask questions that will help you detect and measure the emotional intelligence of your candidates. Use Carolyn Sun's list of interview questions (which includes “Who inspires you and why?”) as inspiration for crafting questions that work for your organization.²

4. Use references for clues

Emotionally intelligent people often form lasting friendships in the workplace, so speaking with candidates' references can yield valuable information about how they fit with the teams at their previous companies. Be sure to talk not just with former managers but also with peer-level colleagues who worked closely with your applicant.

5. Create a culture that appeals to emotionally intelligent people

Emotionally intelligent candidates need more than a salary and benefits—these top performers expect a lot from their employers in exchange for their skills. To promote engagement and long-term retention of this valuable group, you'll need to provide an environment that is transparent and respectful to employees, includes clear growth paths, and offers opportunities for learning and collaboration.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF HIRING FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The vice president of Glassdoor, Mariah Deleon, points out that employees who have high emotional intelligence “are better able to work in teams, adjust to change, and be flexible”—all skills of value to any organization.³ Emotionally intelligent people help businesses grow, promote team unity, and can be great choices for leading the company down the road. All you have to do is find them, engage them, and respect them! ■

Ryan Ayers is a business and technology consultant and the marketing manager for and contributor to the website A Real Online Degree. He can be reached on Twitter at @TheBizTechGuru.

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AN EXCERPT FROM *CLASH OF THE GENERATIONS:
MANAGING THE NEW WORKPLACE REALITY*

BY VALERIE M. GRUBB

Leading the human capital functions in corporate America has become increasingly difficult in recent years—thanks in large part to shifting workplace demographics. More Baby Boomers are sticking around than originally expected, and even though Millennials have been working for a decade now, we still haven't figured out how to cope with them. And to make things even more challenging, the members of Generation Z are poised to enter the workforce in just a few short years. This excerpt from *Clash of the Generations: Managing the New Workplace Reality* presents an overview of the situation—as well as suggestions that managers can implement to help their organizations survive (and thrive) in the new workplace reality.

**CLINGING TO THE PAST IS THE PROBLEM. EMBRACING
CHANGE IS THE SOLUTION.**

—GLORIA STEINEM, *MOVING BEYOND WORDS*

THE CHANGING ROLE OF HR

Managing in the new workplace reality is hard on everyone but especially for those in HR who are charged with overseeing a company's human capital programs. During the recent recession, companies had the upper hand when it came to talent: because there were more people looking for jobs than were available jobs, employees were extremely wary about leaving their positions. With the improvement of the economy, however, the pendulum has swung the other way, and in the post-recession years organizations are having to work harder than ever to recruit top performers. Companies are currently experiencing the HR version of real estate's "buyer's market": there are too many jobs and not enough people to fill them. Consequently, current and prospective employees can be a lot pickier about what positions they fill.

For example, over the past decade, Millennials have entered the workforce to find it already a very crowded place, full not only of Generation X employees but also of older workers who haven't been retiring in the numbers that were expected (and highly discussed) around the turn of the millennium. Complicating matters further is the fact that many Millennials expect to love their jobs and want more than just a paycheck: they want missions that they can support and companies that are interested in their personal growth. For these reasons, more so than any other generations Millennials are far more likely to quit a job that they don't like (whereas Generation Xers and Baby Boomers are a little more patient about waiting for a promotion or more opportunities). Millennials aren't the only ones being choosy, though. As any HR executive can tell you, when Generation X or Baby Boomer employees find that their needs aren't being met, they too will look for other opportunities.

Adding to the challenges facing the HR executive are the company leaders who do not fully embrace the policies and practices that support the expectations of today's workforce. Corporate leaders love to tout inclusion and diversity as company priorities, but in many instances their efforts amount to little more than merely checking a box and don't actually have an effect on corporate culture. If diversity and inclusion are treated as "nice to have" initiatives (and not as high-priority business imperatives), they can receive mixed support from up high—and there's only so much HR can accomplish in an organization without strong support from senior management. If your company fits this description, it's important for you to demonstrate the bottom-line value of diversity and inclusion *before* trying to make

any changes. If the top executives don't see that value, you'll find it difficult to update existing programs or roll out new ones designed to engage employees of all ages.

What do most senior management teams care about? The bottom line. Focusing on that is the key to persuading your executives to embrace the business case for diversity. A great place to start is by analyzing your customer base (that's right, your *customer* base) first—even before looking at your employee base. Discussions about sales will certainly get your CEO's attention. So involve the senior sales executives and review the generational demographics of your current clients or customers. Does your workforce reflect the generational makeup of your customer base? Is the company missing any opportunities by not servicing all age levels with its product? If so, how can the organization best reach those overlooked age groups?

Next, review projected growth for your company, both in terms of volume and in terms of product offerings. Discuss the following questions:

- How does the projected growth compare to the projected makeup of your employee base in the future? Are the two proportionately equal?
- Will the generational makeup of your employee base five or ten years from now reflect your customer base at that time?
- Does your product age with your customers, or will your customers look to a competitor as they (and your existing product) grow older? How can you keep your customers coming back to you and buying more of your product instead of moving to your competitors?

Mirroring your employee base on your customer base can help ensure that your products stay relevant to your customers as they age. As your older employees find their own needs changing, they'll know how to adapt your products to meet the needs of your similarly aged customers. Having a diverse ages in the workplace can also help reduce the group think that can dominate employee populations that are homogeneous in age and background (the "like hires like" phenomenon), thus providing the broadest range of ideas possible for your products and services. Pay attention to whether the local population is aging (or trending younger), and how that shift might affect both your sales numbers and your recruiting and retention efforts. The savviest organizations are radically modifying their business practices *now* in order to prepare for future changes in their employee base and (perhaps more importantly) in their customer and client bases as well.

One reality that's having a huge impact on the bottom line is the difficulty many companies are having filling open positions with

people who have the particular skills needed to do those jobs. The so-called skills gap continues to grow each year, making hiring increasingly difficult and bringing challenges to retention as well. If your most experienced employees leave your company, does that help or hurt its skills gap? What is the "sweet spot" where your company has sufficient employees of all ages with enough diverse skill sets (including both experience and newer skills) to mitigate—or even eliminate—the skills gap?

If bringing in younger talent is widening your skills gap, how can you utilize your older workers to bridge that gap? The real challenge lies in figuring out how to adapt HR policies to retain older workers. One possibility is to offer something many mature workers value (such as more flexible schedules) in exchange for their learning new skills to help bridge a skills gap in your organization. (For example, one major drugstore chain keeps older workers on board and engaged [rather than headed out the door into retirement] by offering them flexibly-structured positions with fewer hours—an enticement that's been very effective at helping managers and HR executives staff difficult-to-fill retail positions.) What other incentives can you offer to existing older workers? Also consider whether there are demographic changes occurring in the geographic area where your company is located that can affect your employee base?

The ability to understand and respond to consumer demands is critical to your company's future survival, and as many HR executives are figuring out, it will take outside of the box thinking to ensure that your workforce is prepared to meet your customers' needs. Linking your company's projected growth to the makeup of your workforce can safeguard your organization's relevance now and in the future. Figuring out answers to these questions can arm you with the data you need to approach your top executives. If you can clearly demonstrate that such policies will have a positive effect on the company's bottom line, you're more likely to get senior management on board with enacting policies that support the endeavors and goals of an age-diverse workforce. ■

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The Right Way to Onboard Remote Employees

BY VINCENT MICHELINO

Many companies have long been reluctant to embrace telecommuting for their employees, largely out of fear that efficiency would plummet if workers weren't in the office where management could keep an eye on them. But with recent studies demonstrating that the increased employee satisfaction derived from letting people work from home can lead not only to increased efficiency but also to decreased attrition rates, organizations are starting to take a closer look at how telecommuting can improve their operations.¹ In particular, companies are also exploring how to hire people who will start as remote employees because they don't live nearby.

Today's onboarding processes are, for the most part, pretty effective at helping companies bring new employees on board when those employees are local and work onsite. Sometimes a bit of tweaking is required to make them work for new employees who are local and work remotely. But when new hires live far away and will be telecommuting right from the start, the organization needs to refine its best practices for onboarding even more.

As more and more companies hire remote workers, they have to figure out how to bring them on board effectively. Over the years, some best practices have emerged. If your organization is planning to tackle the challenge of onboarding remotely, the following recommendations may help you integrate new remote hires into your company and its culture.

1

MEET IN PERSON

Geographical distance between the company and remote workers can lead to gaps in their participation and motivation. Therefore it's critical that your onboarding program maximize engagement and give new hires a strong first impression of the company culture. Because remote workers won't get the full experience of working in your office environment, invite them to make an extended visit to company headquarters as part of the onboarding process. That will give them an opportunity to connect with their managers and peers face to face, establish onboarding goals, and get an up-close feel for day-to-day business operations. This visit is likely to be one of the few times that remote workers are present in the office, so be sure to create a structured working itinerary for the duration of their stay in order to make the best use of their time there.

¹ Nicholas Bloom. 2014. "To Raise Productivity, Let More Employees Work from Home." *Harvard Business Review* online, January–February, hbr.org/2014/01/to-raise-productivity-let-more-employees-work-from-home.

2

COMMUNICATE

If your company has ambitions of branching out remotely, it needs to have internal communication systems and a virtual office network to facilitate communication among all employees and management, wherever they're located. Options include a video or instant messaging service (such as Skype and Slack) that allows real-time company-wide communication, as well as a virtual private network (VPN) that allows computers outside of your corporate network to access internal resources. This digital infrastructure gives remote employees the tools they need to work (both alone and collaboratively) right from day one. It also gives them a direct channel of contact with managers and peers for communication pertaining to ongoing projects or even just friendly banter. And advances in cloud computing make it even easier for remote employees to contribute to centralized file repositories (such as Google Drive and SharePoint) in order to share their work or contribute to team projects.

3

BE CONSISTENT

Formal onboarding training is recognized as a significant contributor to employee success and retention; in fact, "77% of new hires who hit their first performance milestone had formal onboarding training."² Therefore, it's definitely something that companies should offer to all new hires. But it's also important that they provide an onboarding process to offsite employees that's as comprehensive as the one available to onsite workers. Altering an existing onboarding process to accommodate remote workers shouldn't require drastic changes. For example, an organization can implement a new hire portal to provide one central location through which remote employees can manage all their onboarding objectives; learn about company values, benefits, and policies; and review training schedules.

² UrbanBound. 2015. "The Onboarding Statistics You Need to Know." UrbanBound website, January 16, <http://www.urbanbound.com/blog/onboarding-infographic-statistics>.

Welcoming remote employees into the fold enables a company to see how far beyond the office walls its culture can reach. Thanks to technological advances, it's now easier than ever for remote workers to contribute effectively to an organization. Having a robust onboarding program in place can ensure that your company is ready to welcome and integrate new employees—wherever they may be. ■

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THREE WAYS TO MAKE EXIT INTERVIEWS MORE EFFECTIVE

BY SUZANNE LUCAS

The exit interview is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, departing employees can provide information that a company desperately wants in order to improve. On the other hand, because employees have little motivation to provide complete, honest reasons for their departure, the exit interview can yield inaccurate information that makes it more difficult for a company to forge a path ahead.

Even when promised up one side and down the other that individual answers will be kept confidential, a departing employee is unlikely to believe that statements such as “I’m leaving because my manager is a jerk” won’t eventually get back to the relevant party. Because a manager who’s a jerk isn’t likely to be someone who takes negative feedback well, their former reports may fear jeopardizing being able to use him or her as a good reference. Consequently, those employees probably won’t be willing to speak frankly during the exit interview.

So if departing employees aren’t likely to be entirely honest, should companies hold exit interviews at all? The short answer is yes. The long answer is yes—but only if you ask for constructive criticism, understand how to use the information you’re given, and focus on trends. Here’s how to ensure that your exit interviews are effective.

COVER YOUR BASES WITH THE BASICS

Even when they’re reluctant to open up completely during an exit interview, most employees will still be fairly straightforward about a few basic topics. When assessing your own company’s policies and procedures, it’s important to consider outgoing employees’ answers to questions on the following ‘big four’ subjects:

- New salary: Is your new salary higher? Did you take a pay cut?
- New title: Are you making a lateral move? Or getting promoted?
- New employer: Are you staying in the industry? Becoming more specialized?
- General company policies: How do you feel about paid time off, flexible schedules, work hours, etc.?

For instance, you can learn a lot about your own company’s career-development process by examining the types of positions your employees are taking. If too many people are leaving to take promotions elsewhere, it may be time to examine your company’s performance review and promotion process. Similarly, if too many people are willing to go through the time-consuming effort to find new jobs that offer the same pay and responsibilities as their current positions, company’s current team structures and workloads may need a review.

In addition, feedback about your company’s policies can lead to important procedural changes. If enough people start saying that your health plans stink, then your health plans stink. If people keep saying that the organization doesn’t offer a reasonable vacation plan, then it’s doesn’t offer a reasonable vacation plan. When you hear this sort of feedback, believe it—or continue to lose star employees.

ASK FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM—AND KNOW HOW TO USE IT

Should you try to move beyond the “big four” for more nuanced feedback? Absolutely! But be sure to ask clear

questions and have a process in place for following up on the feedback you receive.

For instance, if you simply ask, “Why are you leaving?” and get “Because my manager is a jerk” in response, it’s hard to act upon that information. Do you report that response back to the manager in question? (If you do that, there’s a good chance that you’ll ruin the future reference for the employee.) Do you notify the manager’s boss that there may be a problem?

Providing individual feedback is more complicated than generating a report with overall performance numbers—and, because of the subjective nature of feedback, could yield inaccurate data shaped by personal bias. If you want exiting employees to provide more useful feedback, don’t make them feel as though they’re just naming names or complaining. Instead, use questions that elicit constructive criticism:

- What changes would have made to your time with us?
- How did your career advance during your time here? What held you back?
- Would you ever be interested in returning to work here? Why or why not?
- What could the organization have done differently during your hiring process?

These HR-oriented questions are within your power to address. However, it’s important that you *do* try to address them: don’t bother asking these questions if you’re not going to do anything about the answers you get. Remember, exiting employees are likely to hear about any changes you do (or don’t) make through their friends who still work for your company.

TAKE FEEDBACK WITH A GRAIN OF SALT

Last, but not least, don’t take every interviewer’s feedback as gospel truth. The statement “My manager is a big jerk” could indicate problems with management-level staff at your company. But when coming from an employee who has a record of coming in late and clocking out early, for example, it could also indicate that the manager was simply managing and didn’t see eye to eye with the employee.

An exit interview can provide valuable information. But because that information comes from a biased source, don’t just consider those interviews individually. Instead, look for the trends and consistent feedback that emerge across multiple exit interviews. By examining a larger data set, you’ll find more ways to improve your company by building a better culture and taking care of problems proactively. ■

Suzanne Lucas spent 10 years in corporate human resources, where she hired, fired, managed the numbers, and double-checked with the lawyers. She can be reached at EvilHRLady@gmail.com.

8 Ways to Deliver Training that Employees Retain

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

Organizations' biggest concern about investing in training is having employees retain the material once they leave the class. No company wants to create a program that doesn't achieve its intended goal of improving employee knowledge or addressing problematic issues. To increase content retention and effectiveness, companies should take the following actions when designing and delivering training.

Set expectations.

Rather than require instructors to fill time so that a session concludes at a specified end time (which can make employees feel that their time is being wasted and therefore leave frustrated rather than motivated), have them wrap up the session when all of the content has been covered. Instead of holding people accountable for being in training for a specific amount of time, hold them accountable for the content.

Make the content relevant.

This may sound like a no-brainer, but a surprising number of corporate training programs offer only theory and no practical takeaways. Programs need to teach participants about how to apply the information they learn, too.

Use models to make a point.

Visual aids assist with learning, so whenever possible use them to make a point, show a process, or demonstrate causality. Allow participants to have copies of them or take pictures of them with their cellphones.

Create engaging activities.

Training participants expect a variety of activities. A full day of training in which the only activity is "discuss" doesn't offer enough variety. Planning and executing activities puts some pressure on instructional designers, but it's worth the effort to improve participants' engagement.

Take logistics seriously.

The physical environment sets the stage for learning. Today's participants expect not only refreshments and a comfortable temperature, but also WiFi and places to plug in their devices. Don't overlook comfortable seating, too—after all, the mind can absorb only as much as the rear can endure!

Deal with fidgeting.

Anyone who attends training is a busy person who is not used to being in an all-day (or half-day) class. If participants aren't given something to occupy their hands, then they will reach for their phones. So consider providing some inexpensive fidget toys to help everyone stay focused on the training.

Give participants the opportunity to practice.

Telling someone what to do and then saying "Do this when you're back on the job" isn't training. Use roleplaying scenarios to let participants practice what they've just learned.

Tell participants how to use the information on the job.

A great deal of relevant training misses the debrief or takeaway moment. Training needs to cover not only the knowledge but also how to apply it. The debrief is the learning moment that will resonate and stick most with participants.

Classroom training programs are not dying or dead. They are however, facing higher expectations from both participants and organizations. When programs are engaging and provide a takeaway, participants remember what they learn—which translates into a valuable investment of time and resources of everyone involved. ■

Sharlyn Lauby is the author of HR Bartender (www.hrbartender.com), a friendly place to discuss workplace issues. When not tending bar, she is president of ITM Group, Inc., which specializes in training solutions to help clients retain and engage talent. She can be contacted on Twitter at @HRBartender.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A PREMIUM-ONLY HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN?

& DOES THE FMLA COVER EMPLOYEES WITH THE FLU?

BY STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES, INC.

Q. Our company has a Section 125 Premium-Only Plan (POP), so we can deduct our employees' health insurance contributions from their paychecks on a pre-tax basis. Do all employees have this option, or is it available only to certain groups?

A. A Section 125 POP benefits both employees and employers: employees can save up to 40% on their federal income taxes, and employers can reduce their tax liability. Employees of regular corporations, S corporations, limited liability companies (LLCs), partnerships, and nonprofits are eligible to participate in a Section 125 POP. The Internal Revenue Code prohibits individuals who own more than 2% of an S corporation, sole proprietors, partners, and members of an LLC from participating in a POP (though a sole proprietor may employ his or her spouse and offer him or her the benefits of the POP).

Each person who chooses to participate must sign off on the election (typically during the open enrollment period) and must keep that election for the entire year, unless a qualifying event occurs. To have an eligible plan, the company must create and keep on file a Section 125 plan document and summary of the plan description.

Q. This year's flu is starting to hit our workplace. Are employees who are out with the flu covered under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)?

A. 29 CFR 825.113(d) defines which serious health conditions are covered under the FMLA. The common cold, the flu, earaches, upset stomach, minor ulcers, and headaches other than migraines are listed as specific examples of conditions that do not qualify for FMLA coverage unless complications arise. Therefore the flu does not automatically qualify as a serious health condition.

But if the conditions associated with the flu cause the FMLA-eligible employee to be incapacitated for more than three full days and if the employee either consults with a doctor two or more times within thirty days or consults with a doctor once and receives a regimen of continuing treatment (prescription), the employee could qualify for FMLA coverage.

So the answer to your question is the answer given to many HR questions: "It depends." Make sure you have all of the facts before making a determination.

Strategic Human Resources Inc. (www.strategichrinc.com) is a national full-service HR management firm based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Its president and founder, Robin Throckmorton, can be reached at Robin@strategichrinc.com.

HOW TO CLOSE THE SKILLS GAP IN 2017

BY MIKE MCKERNS

IT'S 2017, AND THE SKILLS GAP IS STILL HERE—and it's wider than ever before. If you haven't figured out yet how to deal with the skills gap (or maybe haven't even started thinking about it), don't panic! It's never too late to work on this problem, and here are some great places to start.

EMBRACE THE GIG ECONOMY

Consider breaking one full-time position (or work product) down into several tasks or shifts and staffing each piece with a different worker. This option could work well when a company has trouble finding someone to work at certain times, such as the 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. weekday shift in a manufacturing plant, for example. Breaking that eight-hour shift into chunks (say, 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. on two days, and two shifts of 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. on the other three days) and letting different people work each slot could greatly increase the company's ability to staff those times. More and more companies are embracing this workplace "Uberization," in which employees (gig workers) grab the shifts or tasks that they want and decline the rest.

GO MOBILE—LITERALLY!

Creative staffing involves finding new ways to connect with candidates. Mobile recruiting apps, for example, make it easier for job hunters to browse and apply for open positions. But virtual connections have their limitations, so take inspiration from mobile blood banks and bookmobiles and go where the people are: bring an RV full of mini-cubicles and computers to sporting events, large shopping centers, concerts, and other places where crowds gather. Another option is to set up stand-alone hiring kiosks in grocery stores and shopping malls. Both types of mobile recruiting stations let people apply for jobs and even complete some pre-employment testing all in one convenient location.

BUILD THE BRIDGE

The "skills gap" that most employers are facing today typically arises from one of two causes: either companies simply can't find enough people to staff their unskilled positions, or they can't find enough employees with the specific skill sets that the organization needs. If numbers alone are your problem, then casting a wider net (in part by trying one of the two strategies mentioned above) might help. But if you're mostly faced with a lack of skilled workers, you need to tackle this challenge *before* your future employees enter the workforce. For example, partner with local high schools to establish programs to give students the training they'll need to be able to fill skilled positions after graduation. Reaching out to groups that are underrepresented in your industry (for example, women make up about 47% of the labor force but only 27% of the manufacturing workforce) is another strategy that can help you find the skilled workers you need.¹

Companies will always need workers, and people will always need jobs. Most of the time, those two interests align for mutual benefit. When there's a skills gap, though, both sides struggle to meet. Fortunately, companies can bridge that gap—by thinking outside the box and exploring new strategies. ■

Mike McKerns, SPHR, is the editor in chief of *HR Insights* and cofounder of Mamu Media, LLC. He can be reached at editor@mamumediallc.com.

¹ Deloitte. 2015. "Women In Manufacturing Study: Exploring the Gender Gap." Deloitte website, www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/manufacturing/us-mfg-women-in-manufacturing-2015-study.pdf.

SPICED CAULIFLOWER SOUP

When winter's long nights and dreary weather are getting you down, it's time for the ultimate cold-weather comfort food: soup! Mild cauliflower is an excellent blank canvas upon which to paint more assertive flavors. Here, onions and coconut milk bring their natural sweetness to the party, accompanied by other seasonings that lend a slightly piquant note (without making this dish inaccessible to young or fussy eaters).

Once you have the vegetables chopped, this easy-to-make soup practically prepares itself—and leaves you with only one pot to wash afterward. Spiced cauliflower soup works well as a first course or as an entire meal on its own (especially when served with cheese and crusty bread on the side). Try a batch of this hearty soup today, and you may find yourself wishing winter would stick around even longer!

YIELD: 6 servings **TIME:** about 35 minutes

NUTRITIONAL INFO PER SERVING:

Calories:	231 cal
Fat:	21 g
Dietary fiber:	3 g
Sugars:	4 g
Protein:	4 g

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

1 large head of cauliflower (about 2 pounds)	1 ¼ tsp ground cumin
2 medium white onions, chopped	½ tsp ground coriander
4 cloves garlic, chopped	½ tsp ground turmeric
2 Tb canola oil	1 can of coconut milk (usually 15 or 16 oz.)
4 cups of water	Salt and freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS:

1. Finely chop the onions and garlic. Clean the cauliflower and cut it into small florets.
2. Warm the oil in a large stockpot, then saute the onions and garlic over low heat until soft (about 8 minutes).
3. Add the water, cauliflower, spices, and ½ tsp salt to the pot. Bring to a boil, then simmer until the cauliflower is tender (about 15 minutes).
4. Puree the soup right in the pot with an immersion blender. (Or puree it in batches in a regular blender.)
5. Add the coconut milk and heat until warmed through.
6. Season with salt and pepper.

NOTE

This soup has a beautiful simplicity all on its own. But it plays well with toppings, too!

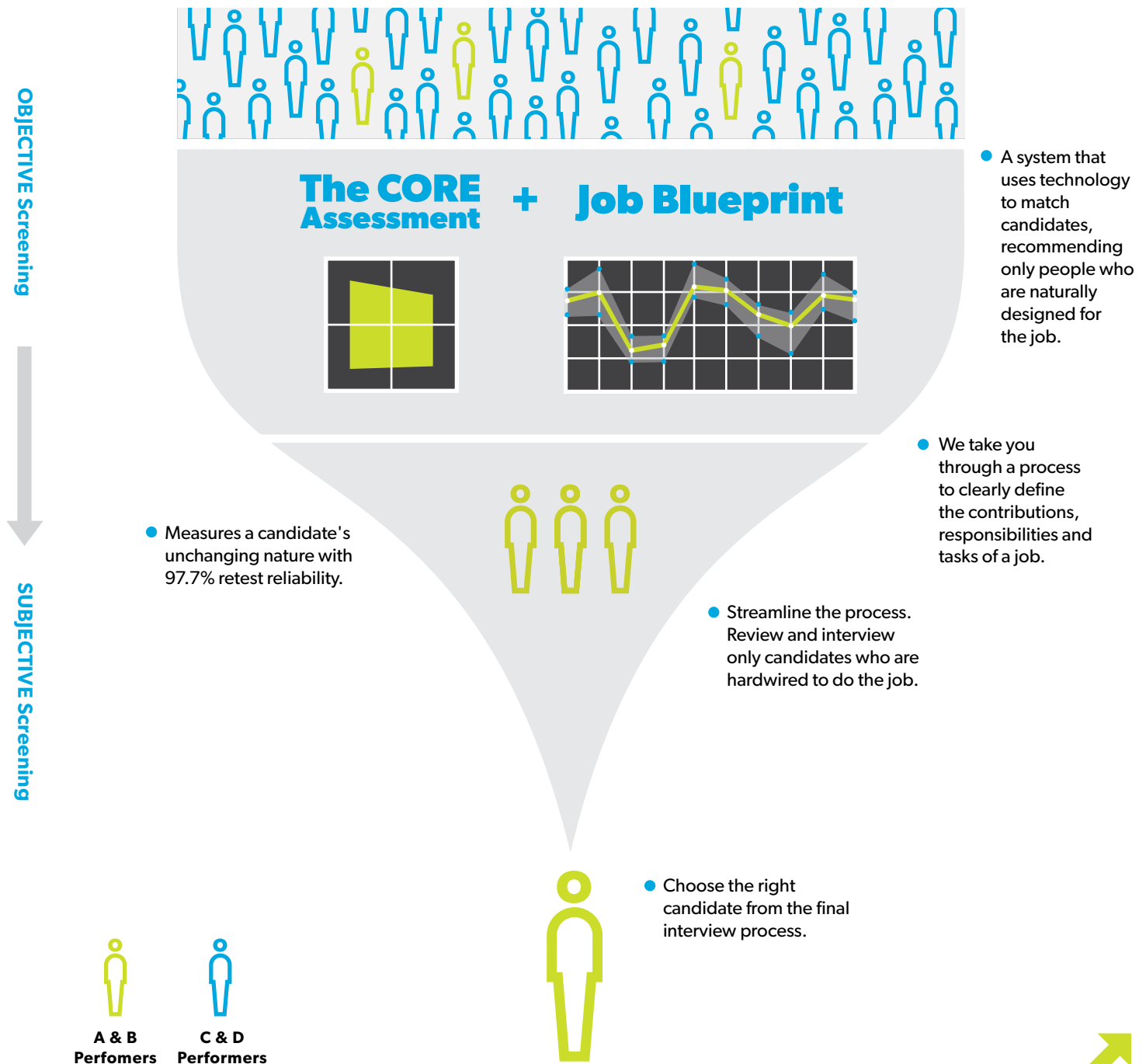
— Add chopped parsley for a dash of color.

— Want to kick it up a notch? Sprinkle crushed red pepper or cayenne on top.

— Add some crunch with toasted nuts or croutons. ■



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