

# I don't want to slag off the CV, but...



Weeding out the perfect employee from a stack of well groomed CVs is a task in itself but as HR Direction director Simon Panckhurst says relying on this traditional form of selection, could prove a critical mistake.

by **SIMON PANCKHURST - Canterbury Today, April 05.**

"Sorry....she looked very capable on paper".

We've all experienced job applicant CV's overflowing with relevant experience and qualifications. Unfortunately some applicants quickly indicate their total lack of suitability before answering the first interview question. Effective shortlisting from a standard CV is exceedingly difficult but is this any great surprise? Is the information applicants typically provide a good indicator of how they are likely to perform?

A robust recruitment process begins with the identification of critical skills and attributes for the position. For simplicity, two common generic skills/attributes are proposed;

1. an adequate technical background .
2. an ability to solve problems

Best practice suggests in creating an appropriate interview shortlist we need to assess these competencies rather than skim through the CV and default to intuition.

Applicants typically attempt to prove technical knowledge and expertise with details of qualifications and relevant experience. But how do we compare a 'B' average diploma from Lincoln College with a degree from Waikato with no marks included? Can we safely conclude someone with no tertiary qualifications but with significant work experience is more capable than a University graduate? Work experience with a global multi-national compared with a small local government department?

The reality is applicants learn and develop from work and study opportunities in different ways. Some will excel from limited opportunities, little guidance and minimal resources while others will be led down a golden career path stumbling as they go, oblivious to the catastrophe they leave in their wake and actually learn very little.

Adding to the problem of using the CV to predict performance is that information applicants provide is inherently biased. An applicant normally wants the job (although some do make you wonder) and will therefore attempt to paint themselves in a positive light. Poor academic grades and honest but unflattering

referee reports are absent as will be truthful explanations behind positions that went sour or details of unresolved personality conflicts. Job titles, responsibilities and achievements are typically exaggerated or glorified, sometime beyond recognition.

Even if information on duties and achievements was brutally honest, trying to determine an applicant's ability to solve problems is still largely futile. There are too many unknown variables. Too often we are left comparing apples with oranges. Assessing the merit of a healthy internal promotion is difficult without objective information on the circumstances and the competition. An employee might be promoted because of a lack of suitable alternatives. Similarly their claims of projects completed 'on time and under budget' are just too woolly to make valid comparisons.

Despite best intentions, most applicants also do not have the ability or information to objectively detail their achievements in a meaningful context to someone unfamiliar with their organisation. Even independent evidence can be misleading. Is 'employee of the month' a guarantee of brilliance? Is a positive and well written referee report a reflection on the employee or referee?

Valid and viable alternatives do exist.

HR Direction requires all applicants to respond to a common and relevant work scenario. In 80-100 words applicants might have to demonstrate how they would confront a carefully defined contentious situation or approach a defined project. No longer are we dependent on candidate's biased self assessment, instead we can assess their performance on an even playing field and against relevant criteria. How skills have been developed is irrelevant, measured performance as a predictor of future performance is what matters. Structure, fairness and consistency can be reintroduced. The outcome is shortlisting with confidence.

Forget about apologizing to fellow panel members, get used to their nods of approval.

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