

Let's Talk About Job Fit

A conversation with
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Below is a transcript of a conversation I recently had with a human resource manager for a small employer. We talked about job fit.

DIANNA: HR types like me talk about this mysterious and elusive “job fit” as if it is the ultimate panacea for all things wrong with employees. What is it really and how do we know we have it?

IRA: **Well, Dianna, I agree we talk about job fit a lot but it is really not all that mysterious. The fact is that we hire and retain employees with people who are like us. It has nothing to do with unfair discrimination; it is simply a comfort issue. Each of us tends to feel more relaxed and comfortable in the presence of other people who share similar goals, values, and outlooks.**

DIANNA: Ok, that makes sense but I sense you feel from your comments that getting along with other employees isn't a always a necessary thing.

IRA: Yes, that's right. But don't get me wrong - getting along with your co-workers and bosses is important, but the real purpose of job fit is to get the results you want if an employee does his or her job well.

DIANNA: What do you propose hiring managers do to focus on job fit?

IRA: **I recommend a multi-pronged approach: Interviewing, background/reference checks, and assessments.**

DIANNA: Assessments? Can you tell me which ones you recommend?

IRA: **While the following definition isn't totally accurate according to psychologists, I separate employee assessments into two categories – psychological and personality. Psychological tests were constructed to diagnose clinical pathology and mental health disorders. The behavioral and personality tests we recommend focus on job – related traits and characteristics.**

DIANNA: That makes sense.

IRA: **The benefit of using a personality test or tests is not about finding deep personal secrets but the ability of the manager to get an accurate picture how an employee might spend hours and hours of interviewing and background checking. Besides not having the time, many managers aren't very good observers and listeners.**

DIANNA: I guess that is where HR people help.

IRA: That is true except.....While a third party might know how to ask the right questions, observe the behaviors and listen to the responses for accuracy and job fit, the HR folks, recruiters and the like won't understand the job the same way as a manager of that job, many of whom actually performed the job in the past.

DIANNA: As a career HR professional, I'm not sure I agree.

IRA: Let me give you an example why I feel this way. Let's say you are the HR manager and your boss tells you to find a sales replacement. The job requires that this person is extremely competitive, assertive and confident. Sales in your industry is somewhat cut-throat. Sales people are responsible for getting their own leads and negotiating the sale. The marketplace is over-crowded and margins are slim.

DIANNA: I'm still not convinced I couldn't do a good interview and identify a top salesperson.

IRA: I'd agree. But not everyone has your level of skill and experience. And the reason you and I are talking anyway isn't to persuade HR professionals to use personality tests, but to help the millions of small business owners and managers who don't have the time or skills to thoroughly check out candidates before they hire employees.

DIANNA: I've got it now. What happens is that this perfect job fit submits a resume. He calls the company and asks to speak with the V.P. of Sales. His assistant screens the calls. The candidate refuses to take no for an answer. He continues to call, including over the lunch hour and early morning, when he hopes the assistant is away from her desk. The candidate's behavior demonstrates "persistence and drive", exactly what the V.P. was looking for. The assistant however sees conflict, arrogance, and pushy. In fact she describes him as a "bull in a china closet."

IRA: You are absolutely right. His resume goes right to the bottom of the pile, or even the circular file. She tells the V.P. that this candidate "just wouldn't fit in with our customers". The V.P. doesn't have the time to screen the dozens of resumes or call the candidates, so he accepts her opinion. A high potential candidate is turned away because personal preference got in the way of job selection. Going back to our original question, you must understand the job before you can screen or select candidates and allow your personal biases de-select or select employees. Employee selection is all about hiring people who can do the job for your company, not necessarily hiring employees who can also be your best friend.

DIANNA: I agree. Before we move on, let me ask you something you mentioned earlier. I've read that employers have been sued for using personality tests. But you're telling me testing is okay.

IRA: Psychological tests – the clinical type- are considered medical tests and yes, they pose quite a few legal risks for employers. Personality tests constructed for business are legal to use in conjunction with the interview and reference checks in what the U.S. Department of Labor calls the “whole person approach.”

DIANNA: Can you give me an example.

IRA: Certainly. One of the most famous employment law decisions was based on the MMPI, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. While the information learned from testing candidates was very accurate and reliable, the employer settled the case based on two factors. MMPI was designed to diagnose clinical disorders and therefore was considered a medical test, like I mentioned earlier. Medical tests potentially violate an individual's privacy, which is protected under the law. If you are going to use a test like MMPI in your workplace, you better be able to prove the test is job related and does not violate the candidate's privacy. The courts did not deny the

accuracy and reliability of the MMPI but firmly questioned the legitimacy of the information gained in predicting job performance.

DIANNA: What is an example of a test you can use?

IRA: We highly recommend assessments based on the Five Factor Personality Model. This model, when used and interpreted correctly, assesses personality traits that relate directly to business behaviors like drive, stress management, people skills, persistence, assertiveness, organization skills, attention to detail and more. We use the TotalView Assessment System because it has excellent validation and reliability. And it's easy to use.

DIANNA: I believe you recommend two other assessments, too. Are these five-factor tests?

IRA: Actually they are not. I also do not recommend using them alone without the TotalView for job selection either.

DIANNA: Why not?

IRA: Without a doubt the TotalView is the best job fit tool available. What it doesn't provide me is the behavioral style and what motivates the person.

DIANNA: What are the names of these assessments?

IRA: The first one is Business Values and Motivators.

DIANNA: Didn't you write a book by the same title?

IRA: Almost. My book is Understanding Business Values and Motivators.

DIANNA: How does Business Values and Motivators help an employer?

IRA: Business Values and Motivators – or BVM for short – identifies which two out of the six values drive an individual's behavior.

DIANNA: How does this differ from Interests and Motivation section on TotalView?

IRA: Interests and Motivation assess a candidate's interest in working with people, data or things. Business Values and Motivators identifies what's behind the interest. In other words, what do people value that motivates them. For instance, I might be interested in working with

people because they are a source of money (Economic), learning (Conceptual), or leading (Power and Authority). If I'm interested in working with people but denied the opportunity to lead them or don't feel I'm being paid enough to do so, I'll lose motivation.

DIANNA: Very interesting. What's the other assessment?

IRA: It's called CriteriaOne DISC.

DIANNA: Is this the same as the other DISC tools I've used for training employees?

IRA: It is based on the same 4-style behavioral model, popularized by Jung and Marston.

DIANNA: I'm confused again. If TotalView is a personality test, why use DISC? It seems like you'd be testing the same thing twice.

IRA: That is a common mistake. I describe personality as the engine of a car, values as the fuel, and behaviors as the body style. You can have the same engine in different body styles but wouldn't know that unless you opened the hood and poked around.

DIANNA: I guess that also means the observer has to know what they are looking at and for too. That's a great analogy and it fits with your earlier comments about interviewing. While interview questions are important, you need to know what to look and listen for.

IRA: Now you're catching on. You can also have the same body style with different engines. In the show room they all look the same. But on the open road, they might perform very differently.

DIANNA: I know DISC is often used for communication training. Are you using DISC to identify how the candidate will communicate?

IRA: Partially. What DISC actually measures is what I call the 4 Ps – Problems, People, Pace and Procedures. DISC tells us how Direct an individual is solving Problems, how much energy they put into Influencing other People, how energized they are when working at a Steady Pace, and how Conscientious they are following Procedures.

DIANNA: I've never heard that explanation before. That is so helpful. For the first time I can see how that would help in determining job fit.

IRA: That is only half the story. While knowing what styles energize an employee the most helps in identifying how a job will get done, it is also important to identify the situations that will drain, stress and

burn out an employee. In reading the CriteriaOne DISC graphs, we look at the low energy styles too.

DIANNA: Please explain that to me.

IRA: Let's say you listen to your voice mail after our conversation today and you have five messages. One is your co-worker who asks you to call her with a phone number at your convenience. "It's not important," she says. "Whenever you have time is okay." For the second message, you have to hold the receiver away from your ear. The caller is a very upset customer. She's screaming and demands a fix to her problem "immediately if not sooner." The third, fourth and fifth messages are the same caller wanting to know why you haven't called back. Which person would you call back first?

DIANNA: Well, I know I should call the angry customer first but I need to collect my thoughts. I really hate conflict. I'd probably call my co-worker first and just get that one out of the way.

IRA: In fact, you might be hoping the caller would calm down or maybe someone else took care of the problem!

DIANNA: Very funny – you must have read my mind. But wouldn't most people take care of the easier tasks first to focus on the problem?

IRA: About 80 percent of the population would. But 20 percent wouldn't. These are the high "D" people, the people energized by problems. While they may or may not thrive on conflict, they can't let anything lie. The angry caller got their juices flowing. Even if they took care of the other call first, they would be thinking about the angry caller. Along with the D Style, the I, S and C styles tell us how employees will respond and most importantly whether that response will fit in the business.

DIANNA: That sounds like DISC could help in matching the right manager with the right employee too.

IRA: You bet. That goes back to the team fit. Sometimes an employee can be the most qualified but the manager's and employee's behavioral style will mix like oil and water.

DIANNA: This is starting to make a lot of sense. A manager screens through a pile of resumes looking for the right candidate. What he sees are the behaviors. But the candidate's actual ability to perform the job is hidden in his engine – his personality. That answers why so many managers hire

employees who should work out but don't. These candidates behave like other successful employers during the interview but have different personality traits that drive their performance.

IRA: One more thing about behavioral style. Actually two. The first is that there is no good or bad style. In fact there is not a good or bad style or personality. Remember, all these workplace assessments are neutral – they just assess the individual preferences of normal people. The only thing we are trying to find out is if the candidate will fit the job, team and company culture.

DIANNA: Am I hearing you correctly? It might be possible to have a candidate succeed in one environment and not another, even if he is doing the same job.

IRA: Yes. Let's go back to my sales example. The pushy-won't-take-no-for-an-answer salesperson could be enormously successful in commission sales working in a more cut-throat, competitive culture. But the same person in a more laid-back, relationship based culture may fail miserably if the sell cycle is longer and the customers need time to make decisions. I've seen managers drool over the opportunity to hire a top performer away from competitor only to have them fizzle because the selling philosophy was different.

DIANNA: What's the second thing you were going to tell me?

IRA: A unique and important feature of the CriteriaOne DISC report are the two graphs. One graph represents the natural or primary behavioral styles of the candidate. This graph is extremely stable over time. The second graph is the candidate's perception of how he or she needs to adapt his style to the work environment.

DIANNA: Which one is more important in assessing job fit?

IRA: Both give us good information. The primary style however will tell us how the individual is most comfortable responding to the 4 Ps, and how he will respond when stressed or fatigued. The adapted style tells us how he thinks he should respond. If the two graphs different more than 25 percent in one style or more, this might indicate stress or conflict in the job. While I would never hire or not hire anyone based on these differences, they are excellent predictors of what might stress or burn out an employee if you hire them.

DIANNA: I never realized you could get so much information from the DISC.

IRA: I hear that often. And that is why we use three assessments to match employees to jobs and companies. By combining the results of DISC, Values and TotalView, a manager can accurately assess the personality traits that drive job performance, values that determine what motivates an employee, and the behavioral styles that will energize or de-energize everyday responses to problems, people, pace and procedures.

DIANNA: I have one last question. Can you tell if a candidate tried to fake or manipulate the answers?

IRA: I get that question all the time. That is another reason we use TotalView. In it we have four ways to check if we can trust the responses. The most transparent is what is called Social Desirability scale.

DIANNA: I've never heard it called by that name. I've seen one test have a validity check. Is that the same?

IRA: Yes. It might also be called a good impression scale too. Essentially it asks certain question that tell us if the person is too good. The Social Desirability scale is interesting in that it doesn't only check for faking good, but faking bad.

DIANNA: Why would anyone want to fake bad?

IRA: I'm not sure I have an answer for that but Social Desirability is also a reflection of optimism and skepticism. Obviously the individual who scores high on Social Desirability can be too optimistic. The individual who scores on the other end of the scale is Frank, or skeptical. One reason this occurs is that he might underestimate his personality indicating lack of confidence or just plain old negativity.

DIANNA: You mentioned three other checks as well.

IRA: The TotalView technology also checks for random patterns, too many A's or C's (the choices for each statement are A, B, or C), and too many B's. B's are undecided responses. If a candidate provides too many B responses, we can't get enough reliability to report a clear personality pattern.

DIANNA: Is that the only reason a candidate might answer a lot with a lot of "B" responses?

IRA: No. We have found some people just can't make a decision. Their response to every situation "depends" on what other people think or

what other people want them to do. While too many Bs may weaken the reliability of the overall personality report, we find it very accurate at predicting if an individual will make effective decisions on his own.

DIANNA: It sounds like it's nearly impossible for a candidate to fake out TotalView without getting caught.

IRA: I agree. While anyone can try to fake anything, it would be a lot easier to fake out the manager during the interview than fake out a well-validated, reliable assessment like TotalView.

DIANNA: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

IRA: Two last things. The first is the importance of the interview. While I don't believe you can hire successfully without personality assessments, I also don't believe you can hire without an interview. By using personality tests, the interview becomes more effective. The TotalView even includes recommended behavioral interview questions based on the requirements of the job and the responses of the candidate.

DIANNA: I'm glad you still believe the interview is important. And the second thing?

IRA: While good behavioral interview questions and personality tests are critical tools, their effectiveness counts little in hiring the right people if the responses aren't focused on key job related competencies. For instance, who doesn't want an employee with interpersonal communication skills? But if communication is not absolutely essential for success in the job, even the best questions and tests won't help ensure selecting the right candidate. Managers need to identify the competencies required for the job, then test candidates for skill and proficiency in those areas.

Who is Ira Wolfe?

Ira Wolfe is the founder of Success Performance Solutions and president of Poised for the Future Company, a workforce consulting firm specializing in employee selection, background checks, employee evaluation and performance management. Started in 1996, his clients include EasyHome - one of the largest retailers in Canada, LISI – the one of the largest insurance brokers in California, and NRECA - a cooperative representing 1000 electric utilities and 70,000 employees. But his passion is helping business owners and human resource managers in 100's of small and medium size companies across the country.

Ira is a prolific writer and author. Ira published two books, *Understanding Business Values and Motivators* and *The Perfect Labor Storm Fact Book: Why Worker Shortages Won't Go Away*. He is also a columnist for the *Business2Business* magazine in which he has authored nearly 50 feature stories and was recently selected as a contributing writer for the PA Advocate, a newsletter of The PA Chamber of Commerce.

In addition to print media, Ira writes a weekly electronic newsletter that is distributed worldwide to over 6000 subscribers. (Subscribe free at <http://www.super-solutions.com>)

Ira has served as a board member of the Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ephrata Community Hospital and currently chairs the Entrepreneurship Committee of Lancaster Prospers.

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