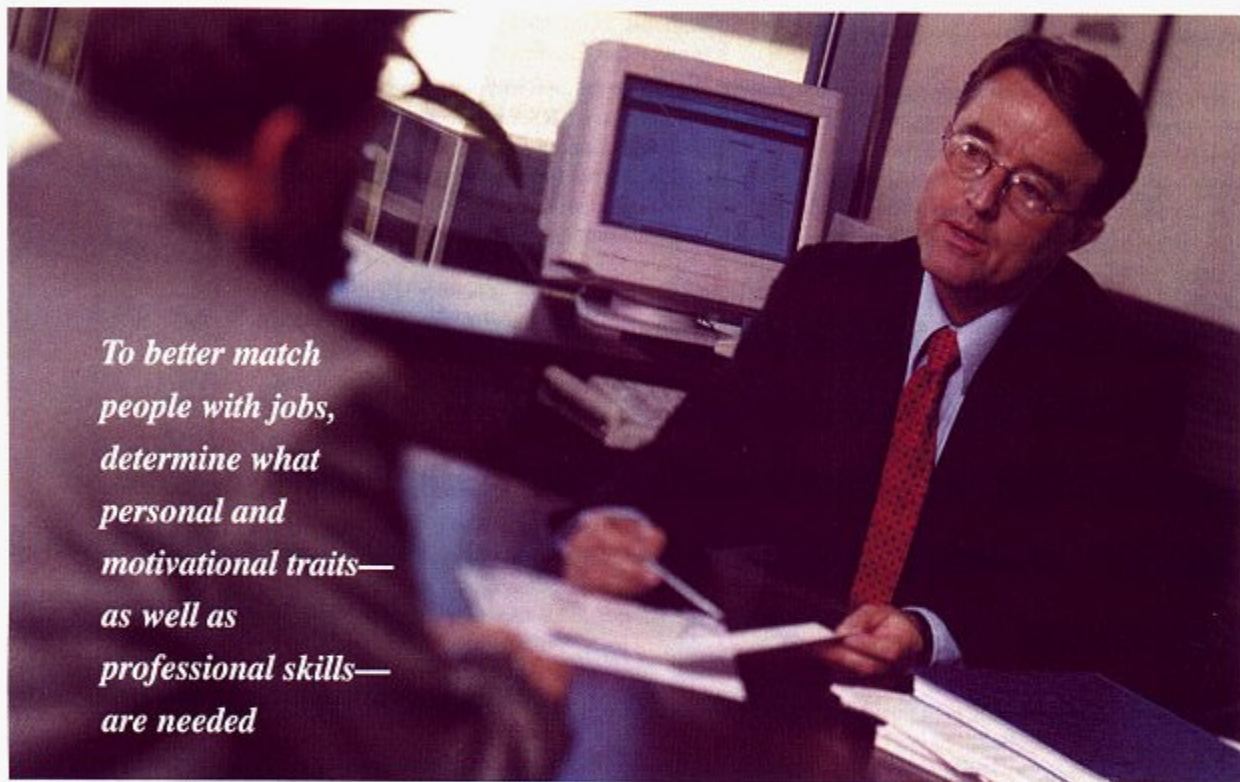


# Benchmarking

## A Better Way to Find Talented Employees



*To better match people with jobs, determine what personal and motivational traits—as well as professional skills—are needed*

**By Nancy Roberts**

**(With an introduction by consultant Sam Garofalo)**

**W**e all know that a good chief engineer usually makes a poor plant manager, and vice-versa. Ever wonder why? In 1997, I was introduced to behavioral assessments as a method of placing the right people in the right jobs. Virtually every Fortune 500 company including IBM, Microsoft and GM uses some type of assessment in their employment process.

One of the most difficult jobs in any business is hiring qualified managers. A general manager, for example, is not only expected to be able to fill a plant with work and get it in and out the door, he is usually expected to do it exactly the way the owner or board of directors want it done. Ironically, the owner or board many times fills the position based on criteria that is flawed. Using assessments gives employers crucial information on job candidates that might otherwise be missed.

Starting on pg. 72, Nancy Roberts will offer an overview of human resource assessments. ■



## Recruiting

### Hiring—a competitive advantage?

In the laundry services industry—as in most other industries—hiring the right people has become a critical business strategy. The time, money and resources it takes to recruit, hire and train even one individual is a significant investment.

That's why many companies are looking at their hiring practices and wondering if there is more that can be done to select the best candidates—the first time.

### You're already doing it!

There is ... and chances are, you're already doing it to some extent. It's called benchmarking. Benchmarking begins whenever you determine criteria for a job and then screen candidates based on that criteria.

You may require a BA degree for a certain position within your company. Or you might want someone with a minimum number of years in the industry. Surely you require certain technical skills or knowledge. These requirements are all benchmarks. You may even have a comprehensive position description or job analysis, especially for positions such as sales reps, general managers, or production associates.

### What's not working?

So with all this criteria being determined, why is there still turnover in key positions? Consider your own experiences. Why do people leave or get asked to leave the positions you've hired them for? Is it that they lack the skills, education or experience required in the position? Usually this isn't the case because these criteria are determined through traditional hiring practices (resume, interviews, references, etc.).

More often than not, it is a person's behaviors, attitudes and motivation that determine success in the job. Measuring this type of criteria is often a better predictor of job performance, satisfaction and retention.

### Measuring what counts

Motivation and ability. These two factors are needed to do any job well. And most employers generally interview potential candidates with these factors in mind. This is important ... but in a sense putting the cart before the horse. Before you can select the right person for the job, you need to define what it takes to be the "right" person. If the position could talk ... what would it ask for?

Each position in a company has specific behavioral requirements. Does the position require a fast pace? Persuasiveness? Detail-orientation? Strategic thinking? Assertiveness? Let the job talk.

Likewise, each position inherently satisfies different motivations. Does it offer frequent pay increases? Advancement? Recognition? Continuous learning? Opportunity to help others? Consider what additional benefits come with the job besides a paycheck.

Assessment tools are available to create job profiles based on these types of factors. Most often the manager (or managers) who knows the position well will answer a series of questions. These answers will produce a report of what the job is looking for in a can-

didate. These reports are then used as a basis for hiring. They can also be used to assist in the writing of job descriptions and classified ads.

This process of using a manager's input to create a job profile is useful but limited to the manager's perception. Here's another way you can determine what the job requires.

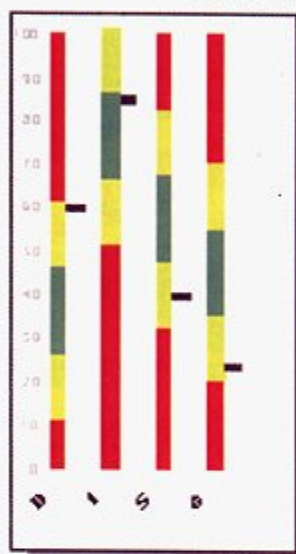
### Clone your top performers

Cloning may conjure up images of Dolly the cloned sheep. But, have you ever had the thought, "If I could only hire another manager just like Tom?" Chances are you weren't thinking of someone with his exact degree from his exact college. Or of finding someone with his exact background, same positions held, or companies worked for. Goodness knows, you weren't thinking about his height

or hairstyle. Most likely when you said that, you were thinking of something more intrinsic. His way of being, his personality, his way of working with others, his attitude about the job and the company.

In this instance where you've got a top performer in your company, a benchmark can be created by assessing the attributes that make him successful. At times, it may even be possible to go outside your company into the industry and select top performers for a certain position.

This happened recently when a company wanted to hire a general manager. Being a small laundry services firm, this was a newly created position and therefore, there was no one to benchmark. So assessments were done on three general managers from other companies that were considered the "best of the best." All were happy to comply (after all, they were told they were the best). From the combined results, the company attained a comprehensive benchmark of the attitudes and behaviors of what makes someone successful in the position. This offered additional criteria for screening candidates.



The graph above tracks candidate attitudes on a 1-10 scale for likely success. Black bars rate attitudes.

### Assessing the candidate

Once a benchmark has been created for a position (either by a manager's input or top performers), the next step would be comparing candidates to the benchmark. This requires candidates to complete a couple of assessments. The candidate's results are then fed into the benchmark. For ease of understanding, consider the example below.

The graph above depicts a red-yellow-green behavioral benchmark. Green indicates a high probability that the candidate will display the behaviors for the job (which usually means the candidate will "hit the ground running.") Yellow indicates a moderate probability, red a low probability. The small black horizontal bars are where the candidate falls against the benchmark.

When the black bar falls next to a green zone—bingo—the candidate matches the benchmark. But what does it mean when a candidate is in the yellow or red? Does it mean they can't do the job and therefore, you shouldn't hire them?

Not at all! This simply indicates a possible area where the candidate may be challenged or experience stress once in the position. Realizing that, at some point, everyone has challenges and stress



fulfilling the requirements of a job, you now have a good indication of what areas in which this might occur. Specific interview questions can be designed to address this red or yellow flag and give you even more information to weigh in your decision.

Although there may be a tendency to use these benchmarks as the dominant factor in the hiring decision, be sure the candidate has passed other necessary criteria (interviews, drug testing, reference checks, etc.) in your screening process. All available information should be taken into account to make the most objective hiring decision possible.

### **Benchmarking benefits**

Besides decreasing turnover and increasing productivity, there are additional reasons to consider the benchmarking process. Benchmarking:

- Reduces human bias, giving hiring managers more confidence in their decisions.
- Complies with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) rules and related laws. Congress has mandated that any tests used must measure the person for the job and not the person in the abstract. Once a benchmark is created, attitudes and behaviors become job-related criteria.
- Provides management with a structure for coaching and developing new employees by highlighting potential training opportunities.

- Gives teams and managers beneficial information on recently hired employees, providing a smoother integration into the team and company.

- Lastly, when using assessments for selection or promotion, the employer should work closely with a qualified professional to ensure that correct procedures are followed. Although most benchmarking systems can be used internally, independent of any outside adviser, some training will be required. It's best to designate an

internal advocate or administrator for the system, thus guaranteeing consistent use and results. **TR**



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