

SIBLING RIVALRY

In the Workplace

Integrity Tests Can Help You Select Compatible Employees

By G. M. Louisig-Nont, Ph.D.

Have you ever noticed that many offices mirror family life, complete with sibling rivalry? Notice the structure of these offices. There is the “boss” (the dad or mom), then the employees (the children). In the family the young children compete for their parents’ attention and try to manipulate the environment to become the favored child or, even worse, try to get the other kids punished. Fortunately, most of us grow out of this behavior, but frequently it’s carried through adulthood and into the workplace. These antics are often disguised by sophisticated smoke screens, but when exposed are recognized as the immature conduct of early childhood. The most common is the self serving time thief who offers the employer a slanted view of other’s activities. (Obviously to divert attention from their own misdeeds.) Haven’t we all run across this person at least once in the places we have been employed?

Workers come from varied backgrounds and often possess dis-

similar values. It’s like putting the *Brady Bunch* sitcom together, minus the scriptwriters busy in the background making sure everyone plays nicely. However, if employees aren’t playing nicely, who wants to be the one to let the employer know? Aren’t most of us uncomfortable about turning in a time stealer, a pilferer or an outright thief? What if it’s the boss’ favorite nephew? How do you report that? Isn’t it easier to just find a new job? It could save a lot of anxiety. Although we may have thought that at one time, it is not the solution. These users are present everywhere, creating havoc and resentment in the employment arena, just as they did in family relationships.

“There tends to be a sense of community in the workplace, and good relationship skills are no longer a luxury but a qualification for effective job performance,” says industrial psychologist Gregory M. Louisig-Nont, Ph.D. “Without good relationships, work will simply not get done.”

An entire office suffers when one employee manipulates the environment to suit himself. Good examples of this are sociopaths. They are unable to conform to company policies and may demonstrate a complete lack of social responsibility. They seek instant gratification, exploit the system and their fellow workers and ultimately disrupt the smooth functioning of any workplace. Yet, who is going to volunteer that information to the employer? No one, of course. No one wants to lose a job or

suffer retribution if not believed, especially if the “interviewee” charmed the boss during. So sociopaths continue to excel in the interview through their charisma, then once hired cause damage behind the scenes where they work

VALUES ARE IMPORTANT

One way to minimize hiring dishonest people is to hire those with similar values. Having similar beliefs in work ethics helps to increase employee compatibility

“Values do not exist in a vacuum,” Lousig-Nont says. “People who have values such as honesty will tend to have a whole set of positive values. Responsible parental guidance teaches the value of honesty early in life, along with the related values of hard work, dedication and always doing your best.” One way to find trustworthy people who possess an honest work ethic is to test for these qualities before hiring. Even sociopaths, who possess the mysterious ability to say exactly what an interviewer wants to hear, have trouble beating honesty tests.

These tests are written psychological instruments that claim to identify people who have a tendency toward dishonesty or irresponsibility in the workplace. There are several types, but studies have shown that tests based on open admissions of attitudes and behavior are more reliable than personality based tests. The PHASE II PROFILE, a pencil and paper employment integrity test, asks questions that determine the levels of honesty and integrity a person may possess. Lousig-Nont, a former law enforcement officer with a master’s degree in criminology, developed the PHASE II PROFILE based on observations that individuals involved in theft have similar attitudes.

“The PHASE II PROFILE measures the

values a person learns early in life from responsible parental guidance,” Lousig-Nont says. “The test was originally designed to measure a persons propensity to steal, but we found that people who do well on the test tend to be friendlier and have better social skills than dishonest people.”

In tests done at Ohio University a correlation was found between those who scored high on the test those who possess a solid work ethic, valuing work for it’s own sake. A blind research study also illustrated that individuals who passed this test were ranked by senior management teams as significantly more productive than those who did not pass.

Why would applicants admit to dis-

honest behavior? One reason for an applicant’s truthfulness on tests is think if they try to fake their way through, they will appear too honest. They’re correct. Reliable and valid honesty tests have control questions that act as built-in safeguards to tip off whether test takers are answering honestly. Without validity scales, tests can be faked.

Another reason for being truthful is that people who are dishonest rationalize their actions.

“Even though they tend to minimize how much when asked, they are not reticent in admitting dishonest behavior,” Lousig-Nont says. “They feel their conduct is justified and do not see themselves as being out of the ordinary

They see themselves as ordinary people in a dishonest world where everyone is stealing. Honest people simply do not have the intrinsic ability to rationalize dishonesty as do dishonest people.”

Honesty and integrity tests are not meant to replace the traditional interview. Instead, these instruments enhance hiring by cautioning employers about undesirable attitudes an employee may possess. Testing saves time weeding out employees who may have a proclivity toward theft.

There is little resistance to testing; most job applicants dismiss them as a routine part of the application process. Psychological statistics have shown that 92 percent of test takers accepted the PROFILE,

while only 3 percent resented it. The rest had no opinion.

GUIDELINES FOR USE

Employers should be cautious when deciding which tests to use. It is recommended that companies use time-tested instruments developed by reputable companies. Ask how a test was validated and if independent university studies have been conducted. To avoid legal liability, tests should follow all state and federal guidelines and be nondiscriminatory. Good pre-employment tests are relatively inexpensive and require no special training to administer. Results can be tabulated immediately using accompanying software.

continued on page 54

Testing, continued from page 53

Although it's unlikely that you'll have a business full of sociopaths, it is very possible that some workers may steal or take advantage of the system. These people have no problem rationalizing dishonesty when they want something—and they definitely don't “play

well with others.” They often lie to employers (the parents) to make themselves (the favored child) look good, while casting suspicion on other employees (the siblings). The best way to avoid these people is not to hire them. You can then maintain the sense of community and good relationships in the workplace by leaving those

destructive children's games at home. 

About the Author

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