Don’t Hire Till You Check the Whites of Their Eyes

By Gregory M. Lousig-Nont, Ph.D.

“Don’t hire until you check the whites of their eyes.” Okay, so it’s not quite the way Colonel William Prescott said it, and this isn’t Bunker Hill, but you get the idea.

Direct your energy to where it will do some good. The men on Bunker Hill were short on ammunition and every shot had to count, likewise in the hiring arena, since legislation has eliminated numerous techniques for learning about job candidates. Because former employers have clammed up from fear of lawsuits, and resume-writers are able to transform the smallest achievements into Nobel Prize worthiness, employment checks and resume have lost their punch. Employers are utilizing other methods for making hiring decisions.

Two of these are pre-employment testing and the knowledge gleaned from the interview. Combined with interpretation of physiological signals such as eye movement, using testing before speaking to a job candidate offers key topics to discuss and at the same time creates a powerful interview.

Reading Their Body Language

Because of my strong belief in testing and purposeful interviews, I created the Phase II Profile, an honesty and integrity profile that has been used for the past 20 years to evaluate job candidates. In his study of employment screening methods, I have reached some conclusions about interviewing techniques.

The major problem with most interviews is similar to the problem with most application forms. The areas that are really important to know about in order to make an informed hiring decision (e.g. what a person is really like) are usually never addressed. A more comprehensive profile of a person is needed to make this kind of determination.

Profiling applicants involves learning to interpret the outward manifestations of the inner physiology that takes place when a person lies. Proxemics (how each of us handles personal space), neuro linguistics (the study of eye movements with relation to which side of the brain is being accessed in order to formulate an answer to a question) and kinetics (the study of body movements) are three areas of knowledge that give an interviewer an edge. The fear of being detected in a lie sets off these physiological activities. Truthful answers generally are very direct with no accompanying body movements.

The Eyes Tell It All

Eye movement in response to a direct question should send up a red flag to the interviewer. If you ask applicants if they have ever been fired from a job, they should be able to answer this question immediately and without hesitation.

If they say no but look to the left, they may be remembering the time when the boss called them into the office and fired them. If they look to the right, they may be constructing a plausible “but.” For example, the answer may be, “No, I wasn’t fired, but I was laid off.”

Only if the questions are phrased by the interviewer in a straightforward, simple, direct manner can eye movement be questioned as an indicator of deception.

For example, no significant eye movement should be noted if the question is direct and to the point and one that should not require thought, such as “Did you ever murder anyone in cold blood?” Every person should have this information readily available in their...
conscious mind for immediate retrieval. A direct question such as this that elicits an answer like, “Not that I can remember” should give an interviewer pause for concern.

**Learn to Listen**

The astute interviewer listens to make sure that the interviewee's answers are given directly and are not evasive. An evasive answer could be characterized as follows: You ask if the person has ever been fired from a job and instead of the applicant answering yes or no, he says, “I have always had a good work history”

This answer is given in the hopes that you will move on to the next inquiry.

He really didn’t lie because he didn’t deny your question; he gave you an answer he hoped you would interpret as meaning that he has never been fired from a job.

The interviewer should be aware of delayed answers. Remember, the truth is readily available. Only a lie takes time to concoct. Repeating the question, answering the question with a question, too quick or broken or incomplete answers, as well as swearing to God on a stack of Bibles or dead mothers’ graves, all should be viewed with caution.

**Give ‘em a Hand**

It is always advisable to shake the applicants hand prior to the interview to establish a norm. Then, do it again after the interview for comparison. If before the interview the applicant’s hand is warm and dry and after it is cold and wet, then the individual has gone through some intense sympathetic nervous system arousal during your interview. Sympathetic nervous system arousal causes increased perspiration and decreased warmth because of a lack of blood in the extremities and the capillaries close to the skin.

The professional interviewer must realize certain factors that can taint the reliability of such behavior. If the room is cold, the person may sit with arms and legs crossed. If the interviewer num-
bles when asking a question, the interviewee may repeat the questions for clarity. If the interviewer asks questions that are vague and ambiguous, the interviewee may hesitate. You must also be aware that there are cultural and emotional exceptions to these general rules.

One single variance in behavior may be meaningless, however, if the examinee continues to exhibit the same behavior each time an area is discussed. It is a strong indicator of problems with that area. I suggest that if deceptive behavior is noticed when discussing a person’s last place of employment, for example, that the interviewer proceed with other areas of inquiry.

After the interviewer has proceeded for about two or three minutes, go back to discussing the last job again. If in discussing the previous job the behavior once again reappears, then the interviewer must conclude that there is a serious problem associated with this previous employment.

**Crime Doesn’t Pay**

I am a former law enforcement officer with a master’s degree in criminology and I learned that individuals involved in theft have attitudes in common. With that background, I developed the Phase II Profile based on an observation made while interviewing job applicants. This pencil and paper employment integrity test, asks questions that determine the levels of honesty and integrity a person may possess.

Honesty and integrity 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.

Why would applicants even admit to dishonest behavior? The reason for an applicant’s truthfulness on written tests is that they think if they try to fake
their way through, they will appear too honest. They’re cor-
rect. 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 dis-
nonest rationalize their actions.

They feel their conduct is justified and see themselves as ordi-
nary people in a dishonest world where everyone else is steal-
ing too. Honest people do not have the intrinsic ability to
rationalize as do dishonest people.

Wouldn’t you like to know why your job candidate felt there
was a time when he might have had a good reason to steal
from a place where he worked, even though he didn’t? Many
people answer true to this question on the profile, and they
also admit to actual dollar amounts they have stolen from their
previous employers.

Unlike Bunker Hill, it’s not necessary to see the whites of
your future employees’ eyes, but you can gain insight on
what a person is like. You can do this through testing candi-
dates, then paying attention to eye movements and body
gestures during the interview. You are not on the battlefield,
(although it sometimes feels like it) and your prospective
employees are not your enemies, but they can be if you hire
the wrong one.

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