Pre-Employment Testing

The cost of recruitment to employers is often a huge expense that we only plan or pay for when forced to. Therefore, it is essential that through our recruitment process that we get it right every time. This article will discuss the importance of pre-employment testing and provide some examples and ideas on how to implement basic pre-employment tests into your organisations recruiting process.

I know many organisations that have employed people based on great applications or a great performance at the interview, only to find in the first week into the position they can't do what they said they could and often the employer either pays for the extra training required or has to readvertise the position. This ultimately puts your business on the back foot to where they could have been if they had someone that could hit the ground running, or at least skipping, on commencement of the position.

Why test

Most organisations have a recruitment process that includes an application, interview, referee check processes and sometimes a medical check and that's where it ends. We don't actually test if the candidate can actually perform the tasks we are asking of them.

Organisations that implement pre-employment testing into their recruitment processes will enable their recruitment team to make the best possible choice of the candidates that present themselves.

When to test

It is strongly recommended that you include some pre-employment testing either at the interview stage or after the interview once you've made a further short list from your interviews, i.e. with the top two or three candidates.

Pre-employment testing gives you the confidence that the candidate can actually perform in the way they stated they could as per their application and interview.

These tests can be small, no longer than an hour and we need to make sure that we advise the candidate that they will be participating in a test, the type of test and if they need to bring anything along with them.

You must ensure your pre-employment testing is relevant to the position, and there is no discrimination through the process. You can test candidates against tasks or behaviours that have been covered in the position description or in the selection criteria.

Pre-employment testing could include the ability to use a certain software application, to test phone answering techniques, problem-solving techniques, literacy, safety behaviours or even a quick quiz.

What to test

To work out exactly what you want to test in your pre-employment testing, you first need to identify what are the most important tasks or behaviours that the candidate needs to be able to perform in the position. This might only be one or two predominant tasks and you test against them.

Let's say you are employing a typist and one of the key selection criteria was to be able to type 60 words a minute with 90% accuracy. Due to the workload this position gets this criteria and ability is extremely important. In this particular case you could set up a typing test either before or after the interview to ensure the candidate can actually do this. There are many free typing tests available online.

Examples

Below are some examples of internal testing that you could do depending on the different positions.

Accountant: You could provide the candidates with a mock general ledger and have them balance it. You could ask them for a description of certain terms that are generally used in this position. For example, debtor, creditor, EFT, general ledger, etc.

Mechanic: You could set up a table of tools that a mechanic would use and have the candidate identify the tools and provide examples of how you would use them. You could do the same with substances such as petrol, diesel and oils.

Stockman: You could have the candidate demonstrate that they can saddle up, ride a horse and maybe even round up a herd of sheep or cattle.

Marketing: The candidate could do a mock press release or a flyer for a certain event providing them with a computer, the details of the event and a timeframe. This will also demonstrate what software packages they can use.

Teacher: Provide the candidate with a syllabus of a course that the successful candidate will be teaching and ask them to map out a lesson plan.

Administrative or Clerical: You can have the candidate do several small tests around the office using the computer, the photocopier, doing word processing and answering the phone.

Information Technology: You could create a scenario where a computer is not working and have the candidate identify and rectify the problem. Or create a scenario of connecting a printer to a computer. Depending on the type of position you may even require the candidate to set up a server or maybe even a domain. Information technology is another position where you could give a quiz in regards to terminology that is used in the industry and their understanding of it.

Machine Operator/Driver: For positions where being able to operate heavy machinery such as, excavators, bobcats, forklifts, cranes, etc., you could have the candidate demonstrate a pre-start check on the equipment and then ask them to do a small drive or operation such as dig a hole, move a pallet of goods, etc.

Telemarketing: You could provide the candidate with a scenario of taking a phone call. This gives you the opportunity to personally see and hear their phone mannerism and skills, and how they deal with a situation or even a difficult customer on the other end of the phone.

Positions where safety is imperative: In positions where safety and sound safety knowledge is imperative; you could provide them with a picture that contains several hazards and ask them to identify the hazards. Depending on the level of the position you could continue and have the candidate risk assess each hazard identified and then recommend some control measures.

Remember that if you implement pre-employment testing for a position in your organisation that the same pre-test must be completed for those shortlist candidates which have applied for that position. Some pre-employment testing can be done internally at only the cost of your own time and resources. Other pre-employment testing can be done externally with organisations that specialise in psych analysis, drug or alcohol and health testing. External testing can be expensive, however is definitely worth your while and this is why many organisations only do external pre-employment testing on the top two candidates after the interview.