HIGHMATCH

A HIGHMATCH GUIDE

CONFIDENT HIRING GUIDE

7 Steps for Hiring Great People

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Introduction

How many new team members is your company planning to hire over the next year? A few? None at all? Plenty since your business is thriving?

Regardless of your situation, **attracting and selecting top talent** is one of the biggest challenges companies face. No matter how innovative your product is and how strong your customer base is, the **quality of your employees** has a tremendous impact on your business' success.

Achieving objectives can be challenging if you do not have the right people on board. The gap between current staffing and the organizational structure needed provides an opportunity to ensure your business has the most capable team members at every level.

How Have You Done in the Past?

For every business that has a solid track record of making great hires, many others recognize their past efforts have been hit or miss. This most often occurs when a company is growing quickly. **In these situations, managers make hiring mistakes because of:**

- Hiring in haste.
- Settling for what even they admitted were "warm bodies."
- Selecting individuals who could do the job but weren't a good fit for the company's culture.

Some of these employees could be marginal performers; others have the potential to cause more significant problems. When there are mis-hires, managers expend added time and energy (often in vain) trying to get the desired results.

Getting it Right the Next Time

While many managers are committed to improving, they are not sure what they can do better. Many have never received formal interview training, nor do they have a proven techniques and process to follow. Others have relied on "gut instinct" which has likely produced mixed results.

Over the past 30 years, we have helped companies take the guesswork out of the selection process. We'll share the techniques that worked in this Ultimate Hiring Guide.

A Great Company Starts With Great People

Every person you hire either strengthens or weakens your team. Many companies struggle with selecting talented people and positioning them for success. Our goal is to give you the skills and knowledge you need to hire great people, giving you an advantage over your competitors.

The following steps offer a roadmap for an outstanding hiring process. They will give your company the ability to move into the future with a team that's capable of achieving or exceeding your organization's goals and vision.

Our seven steps give managers a comprehensive framework for successful hiring:

Seven Steps for Successful Hiring

1. Define the Job
2. Develop a Sourcing Plan
3. Narrow the Field
4. Assess Candidates
5. Check References
6. Conduct a Great Interview
7. Close the Deal

Step 1: Define the Job

One trend we see is a tendency to plunge into the selection process without much forethought or organization. Higher ups tell Managers they need to find "X" number of people and get them on board "yesterday."

Under these circumstances, many hiring managers begin recruiting and interviewing before they have defined the positions or identified what traits well-suited candidates should have. We see plenty of managers using an *"I will know it when I see it"* approach. Others operate off the belief that if they can get someone, anyone, in the position, they can make that hire a good fit after the fact through training and close management.

The Result?

Managers hire a lot of decent, hardworking, and competent people for jobs that are a poor fit for them. They realize that the traits they found favorable during the interview process are not really what is useful in the role the person was hired to do. **Here's the type of dilemma we hear over and over:**

> ***"Yes, it is great that Joe's organized and good with details, but what we now see that we need more is someone who is assertive and able to work with all different types of people."***
>
> **OR**
>
> ***"We were impressed with Susan's problem solving and analytical skills during the interview process, but now we realize the position we hired her for is pretty task-oriented and doesn't give her much opportunity to use those strengths."***

An even bigger surprise to many managers is that they have little-to-no ability to train or manage their way out of these bad hires —usually, nothing they do on their end seems to help the person in the mismatched role. They become frustrated because they thought they had hired a great person, which they may very well have. The problem is that they have put that great person in the wrong job, where no matter how much anyone tries (manager or team member), the employee is probably limited in how well he or she can perform. To make matters worse, managers typically feet like they do not have time to rehire for the position, so they keep plugging along trying to make the round peg fit into the square hole.

Before You Start Interviewing

Moving forward, the first thing managers must realize is that some of the most critical steps in the hiring process take place long before the first interview. **In our training classes we discuss how, well in advance of sitting across the table from a candidate, managers must do three things:**

1. Clarify their end goal to establish a clear target
2. Carefully define the position they intend to fill, *and*
3. Determine what traits they need to get in the person they hire to fill it

Creating a clear target allows you to determine if each person you interview either has or doesn't have what you need. A target also helps you focus your interviews, giving you a clear-cut list of things you must find out about your candidate. It is not as easy to get distracted by a person's featured skills and traits if you keep reminding yourself that while what the individual has to offer may be terrific assets, what YOU need from the person in THIS position is X, Y, and Z.

So, What's Your End Goal?

While it may be overwhelming to spend so much time upfront, remember that the work on the front end is all leading up to selecting your ideal candidate. How do you define what this individual looks like on paper? We recommend a tool we call the **Ideal Candidate Triangle**:
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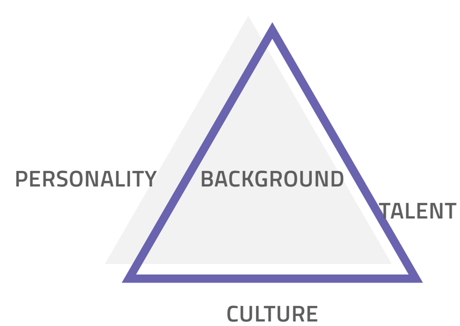

At the center of the triangle is the Background (the skills, knowledge, and experience) you need the person to bring to the job. Around the exterior are three additional areas where your ideal candidate needs to fit: **Personality, Talent, and Culture**.

Later in this section, we will discuss how to define these categories and use them to develop a Hiring Profile, which you will need for recruiting, interviewing and decision-making purposes.

Not only will you use the Ideal Candidate Triangle at the beginning of your hiring process to define your target, but you will also find it valuable at the end when it is time to decide if you want to extend an offer. If you are considering multiple candidates, it is helpful to compare them against the same criteria. (more on this in Step #7).

A Simple but Necessary Document

Using the Ideal Candidate Triangle to develop a Hiring Profile is not problematic if you have one item at your disposal. Unfortunately, most managers will have to take a step back and create this item, because it is the oft-neglected Job Description . Job Descriptions are essential to defining the scope of each position; however, in many companies, they are either woefully out-of-date or non-existent.

When creating or updating a job description, be sure it reflects how the position is structured today, especially if your expectations have changed over the last few years.

This is also an excellent opportunity to determine if the next person you hire needs to be able to do more than the previous person who held the position. Maybe you would like to see the person in the role handle additional or higher level tasks, or perhaps even take care of some of the things you are currently doing. If so, make sure the job description reflects these types of duties.

Sharpen Your Focus: Create a Hiring Profile

Once you have an up-to-date, accurate Job Description, you can use it to develop the essential tool you will need for an optimal selection process: your Hiring Profile. A Hiring Profile is merely a grid which summarizes the key things you need in the person you hire. It breaks the elements down into two categories based on the Ideal Candidate Triangle:

1. **Tangible Qualities:** Background (Skills, Knowledge, and Experience)
2. **Intangible Qualities:** Personality, Talent, and Culture Fit

Tangible Qualities

Many people refer to **Tangible Qualities** as “hard” or “technical” qualities as they represent the observable, measurable elements of a candidate. These are at the center of the Ideal Candidate Triangle. Unless your “ideal” candidate is a total rookie with no experience, you will need to identify the specific background you need.

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Tangible Qualities

Skills

Using the open position's job description as a guide, start by making a list of the skills your candidates should have. **For example, they might need to be able to:**

- Prepare accurate monthly financial statements
- Negotiate pricing with vendors
- Generate new customers through prospecting
- Develop and implement production systems
- Secure financing for new projects
- Investigate and resolve customer complaints
- Design and maintain a website
- Ability to type at a certain speed

Knowledge

Next, identify the specific areas of knowledge you would like your candidates to have. **For example, the position might require:**

- A college degree in a particular field (i.e., management, accounting, marketing)
- Knowledge of your current or future markets
- An understanding of your industry or product(s)
- A networking base of key contacts and relationships
- Knowledge of specific computer or technical applications (HTML coding, Excel, PowerPoint, database mgmt. software)

Experience

The final tangible quality to define is the experience you need candidates to bring to the job. **These could include:**

- Number of years doing the above (or related) tasks
- Level of exposure to your industry, market or demographic
- Experience with other general activities (opening a new division, designing systems, turning around weak sales results)
- Historical patterns (promoted to positions of increasing responsibility, infrequent job changes, a track record of thriving in a commission-only pay structure)

Intangible Qualities

Now it is time to switch gears and determine what type of person could most efficiently do the job. We define the **Intangible Qualities** as those attributes you cannot find out by looking at a candidate's resume but which will have a significant impact on how he or she will perform.

Personality

It is best to start by identifying the ideal personality traits necessary for the job. These qualities are often the trickiest to nail down yet the most important to get right. The assessment industry describes these as the way people are "hard-wired" and links them to the tasks they do best and enjoy most. **Examples include traits such as:**

- Assertiveness
- Sociability
- Structure
- Flexibility

Some people are naturally better at particular tasks because they possess the personality trait that lends itself to that activity. For example, a person with a high level of sociability is better suited to meeting and interacting with people than a person who lacks this trait (that person would prefer to work predominantly on his or her own). An individual who is highly structured will be well-suited to a task that requires following a specific, established system or procedure. A person with low structure, on the other hand, prefers using personal methods and enjoys thinking outside the box or coming up with new solutions on the fly.

When making your list of the personality traits to look for in candidates, once again your focus must be the Job Description. Take a close look at what the person will be spending the majority of his or her time doing on a daily basis, and determine 7-8 traits you feel would benefit an employee most in performing those tasks.

Talents

Next, focus on identifying the talents necessary for success in the job. Talents are innate abilities that allow some individuals to execute specific tasks much more easily than others. If you have a natural talent for something, you can do it quickly and instinctively without a great deal of forethought or strategy. They are the cognitive traits you need the person to possess. **Examples of talents include:**

- Logical problem solving (the ability to think through large, complex problems)
- Rapid problem solving (the ability to deal quickly with many problems)
- Ability to accurately visualize three-dimensional objects

continued

Intangible Qualities

Similar to personality traits, you can identify the talents necessary for success in a particular job by focusing on the Job Description.

Culture

Finally, the last set of traits you need in your candidate are those that will ensure a culture fit. Every organization's values, mission, goals, and beliefs define its culture. Even if candidates are an excellent match for specific jobs, if they do not fit the culture there is no way they will be successful long-term. **Examples of traits that might be part of a company's culture include:**

- Team player
- Commitment to continuous improvement
- Passion for satisfying customers
- Integrity in all actions
- Innovative

Develop a list of the qualities that, regardless of the job, candidates should have to ensure they will buy into and support your company culture. It is crucial to be honest and realistic about both the positive and negative aspects of the current culture. For example, if the owner of the business is highly controlling and insists on being involved in every decision, you will need to hire people who are comfortable working in an environment where micromanagement is the norm. Although this may not sound ideal, it is the reality of the culture, and you need to ensure the people you bring on board can thrive in it rather than resist it.

To ensure the best chance of recognizing and selecting an individual who is a good fit for the job, you have to clearly and accurately develop the criteria for these six areas. Once these are in place, the targets you identify in your Hiring Profile combine to offer the template for selecting the ideal candidate.

Now, take a step back from this exercise and imagine how having a Hiring Profile in place will impact your recruiting and interviewing efforts. When prospecting for candidates, you will be able to describe what you are looking for in the position with accuracy. When interviewing, it will be much easier to tailor your questioning to identify the qualities you are trying to uncover.

Moreover, when evaluating candidates, you will be able to see where the matches and mismatches occur. This one step gives you a solid foundation to begin looking for and selecting a top-notch hire.

Step 2: Develop a Sourcing Plan

A Different Mindset

Once your job is well defined, sourcing should be a continuous part of your process: **Don't wait until you have an opening to start recruiting**. Reactionary recruiting is one of the biggest mistakes we see. When managers delay until they have an open position to start looking for candidates, it takes longer than they hoped to find the right person for the job. The longer the position is vacant, the lower their standards become, creating a situation where they lose sight of their ideal candidate.

Instead, they will often settle for someone who's a not-so-great fit but can start right away. Frustration and desperation can undermine any manager's goal of being highly selective. A much more effective approach is for managers to view recruiting as an **ongoing management task**, not a **situation-specific activity**. We define recruiting as "prospecting for candidates," and prospecting simply means "looking around." Good managers are always on the lookout for possible candidates, even if they do not currently have openings. We advise managers to think of recruiting as assembling a pipeline of candidates, which is nothing more than a list of names of prospects who, if an opening does occur, could be tapped for consideration.

Even the most well-intentioned managers, at times, find themselves with a shortage of candidates and an open position. When that occurs, the strategies we will discuss in the next section will be beneficial and save time by helping you focus on the most advantageous methods.

A Drip vs. a Blast

Companies who have a knack for finding the best people often employ "drip recruiting." Drip recruiting is maintaining an ongoing recruiting effort that focuses on taking action consistently whether they have an immediate need to fill an open position or not.
This action could take the form of:

- Continually updating your social media feeds with company news that highlights your employer brand
- Making sure your website is up-to-date and offers opportunities for people to submit resumes if they are interested in the company (not just applying for a specific job opening), or
- Developing the habit of letting individuals in your network know you are always on the lookout for talent and would appreciate their keeping you in mind if they come across someone of interest

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A Drip vs. a Blast

In businesses where drip recruiting is the norm, managers may have to ramp up their efforts when they do eventually find themselves in the position of filling an open role, but they are usually starting from scratch and feeling panicked as they stare down an empty pipeline and looming vacancy. This can be the difference between feeling like you are ahead as you start interviewing candidates as opposed to feeling like you are already running behind.

The Benefits of a Sourcing Plan

Rather than employ a wide variety of techniques to recruit prospective candidates, a more effective approach is to develop a targeted sourcing plan. A sourcing plan zeroes in on 4-6 recruiting methods that have traditionally provided you with the most qualified people to interview. The easiest way to develop your sourcing plan is to identify where you have typically had success in the past and also which avenues do not produce good leads on average.

For example, if many of your best hires came to you through referrals from current employees, a couple of good outside recruiters, and postings on LinkedIn, then those methods should be part of your sourcing plan. On the other hand, if you have never had any luck at career fairs or with postings on Indeed or Monster, then you do not need to keep trying to kind candidates from those sources. The goal is to devote your time and effort to fewer, but more efficient activities.

Keep in mind that you may need different sourcing plans for different areas of your company. The best methods for recruiting salespeople may not help you find candidates for accounting or I.T. positions. Also, what works for entry-level or part-time jobs likely won't for upper level or management positions. It is also a good idea to periodically try new sources, even if they have not proven useful in the past. As the job market changes, candidates often employ new techniques during job searches, and you may need a new way to connect with them.

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Getting the Most out of Your Sources

No matter which methods you target in your sourcing plan, it is crucial that your approach to each be intentional and well-designed. **Here are some ideas you can apply to the most common recruiting sources:**

Source: Your Website

Hiring specialists estimate that approximately **80% of those age 40 and younger who are looking for jobs start by checking out company websites**. What this means is that you need to use your website as a marketing tool not just for customers but also for candidates. If you already have some version of a "Job Opportunities" tab people can click on, that is great—but it is not enough. That link should take people to a page that **sells your company as an outstanding place to work**. It should include **photos and testimonials from current employees**, **information on your workplace differentiators (what makes your business so unique for team members?)** and an **easy-to-use application process (preferably one that's mobile-enabled)**. Your goal is to stand out from all the other websites they visit and draw them in by selling your culture and opportunities.

Source: Online Job Postings

Whether you use general job sites like Indeed or Monster, post to a more targeted group on LinkedIn, or reach out to prospects on industry-specific sites, the key is to have a compelling, well-written posting. Often job postings are too dry, too long, and too hard to get excited about their contents. Your opportunity needs to stand out and read more like a marketing piece than a want ad.

Here's an example of a well-structured posting that will draw interest:

Sales Development Representative
"Networking Ninjas Needed!"

The Role: Sales Development Representative

HighMatch is seeking a driven Sales Development Representative (SDR) who is team-oriented, passionate about sales, and continually striving to perfect their craft. The SDR will focus on generating 20 to 30 qualified leads each month by creatively reaching out to prospects via email, social media, and cold calls. With the right attitude and activity, this position is open to aggressive career growth.

posting continued...

continued

Source: **Online Job Postings *(continued)***

Sales Development Representative
"Networking Ninjas Needed!"

The Role: Sales Development Representative

The kind of stuff you will do:

- Research companies and build targeted prospect lists.
- Proactively reach out to prospects via cold calling and emailing (40+ calls/emails daily).
- Utilize smart, targeted questions to speak knowledgeably with C-level decision makers.
- Schedule appointments with qualified prospects for our Sales Executives.
- Update all prospect interaction in Salesforce CRM.

What you need to bring:

- 1-2 years of proven success in a sales related function.
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience.
- Cold calling, prospecting and lead generation superpowers or dream of acquiring such.
- Ability to work, learn and grow in a small, fast-paced environment.
- Exceptional writing and verbal communication skills.
- Strong time management skills.
- Positive team-oriented attitude.
- Tech-savviness.

How you will know if you are successful:

- You will achieve and/or exceed designated sales goals every month.
- Prospects will mention how perceptive you are and how you helped them realize solutions they were not aware of.
- Your coworkers will talk about how you are a team player and get things done.

posting continued...

Source: **Online Job Postings *(continued)***

Sales Development Representative
"Networking Ninjas Needed!"

The Role: Sales Development Representative

What's in it for you?
HighMatch is a SaaS company. We build great selection tools for people who make hiring decisions. Our customers' businesses span a wide variety of industries and range in size from small (less than 20 employees) to large (thousands of employees).

We are a small company, and we are growing, and the future is super bright. Our market is huge, and we want more great people on our team to help us accelerate our growth.

Our environment, culture, and benefits include:

- An office in the heart of Buckhead with free parking.
- An open office plan – no cubes here.
- No vacation tracking. When you need it, you take it.
- Casual dress – every day.
- Free snack bar!
- Regular social outings.
- Full health care (HighMatch pays 100% of individual premiums).
- 401k with matching.
- No dead weight or bureaucracy getting in the way.
- Standard equipment includes a MacBook Air, a 27" monitor and cellular reimbursement.
- We are an open book. Everyone has a clear understanding of business performance.
- We move fast, and everyone wears multiple hats, which is challenging and rewarding.

Position Level: Entry level

Source: Employee Referrals

Great people like to work with great people, so if you have a strong team, it makes sense to ask for their help finding candidates. You can do this by communicating job openings internally and asking for recommendations, but you will likely get better results if you enhance this with a formal Referral Program. There are many ways to structure these types of programs, but the most effective ones have specific guidelines (how much a referral is worth, how long the referral has to stay if hired), and many companies offer a choice of incentives. For examples, employees could earn either $1,000 for a referral or extra vacation time, their choice.

Source: Mining Your Network

Word-of-mouth is one of the most common and useful ways for companies to find candidates and for job seekers to find open positions. When you receive the name of a potential hire from someone you know, you have the ability upfront to "pre-qualify" the individual by asking questions and getting information from the referring party. You will also have added credibility if you end up contacting the candidate and can begin the conversation with, "*I was talking with John Jones the other day, and he recommended that I touch base with you about an opening in our ________ department.*"

The key to effective networking is to develop the habit of reminding people that your company is always looking for great employees and to ask if they know of anyone you should have on your radar. This reminder ensures that even if they do not currently know of someone they will have you at the top of their mind in the event they come across a strong candidate in the future.

Source: Outside Recruiters

In situations where you are recruiting for hard-to-fill positions or need to open up your search for candidates outside your geographic area, a professional recruiter may be able to find people you would not otherwise have access to. The best thing you can do if you want excellent results from a recruiter is to complete the Hiring Profile. Being able to communicate your needs and priorities with transparency makes it much more likely your recruiter can match you with candidates who will be a good fit for your position.

Source: Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Glassdoor, and other social media sites provide an opportunity to market to your customers, but they also offer a forum to tell the story of your employees, your culture, and your work environment. Asking current employees to help you promote company events and opportunities through social media can significantly expand your network and help you connect with potential candidates.

Recruiting vs. Marketing

Ultimately, one of the most significant shifts most businesses need to make is to start thinking about recruiting from a marketing perspective. Many of the strategies you employ to attract customers can also be tweaked and used to draw potential members to your team.

Within a business, there's often an emphasis on developing and promoting your company brand, and it can be advantageous to spend time cultivating your "Employer" brand as well. **Your employer brand defines:**

- Your culture **(values, goals, priorities)**
- Your work environment **(team dynamics, office vibe)**
- Your offerings **(compensation, benefits, perks)**
- Your differentiators **(ways you stand out, things that make you unique)**

Leading with your employer brand in your recruiting efforts is a great way to separate yourself from your competitors and improve your chances of attracting the attention of quality candidates.

Step 3: Narrow the Field

The screening process starts when you have an option position to fill. If you have done a good job defining the role and developing a strong candidate pool, the screening process will be much easier and should yield at least two or three strong contenders. Most managers think screening takes place during their first face-to-face meeting with candidates, but it is essential to have an effective process in place for pre-screening as well.

Weeding Out Mismatches

The first element of a good pre-screening strategy is a method for evaluating resumes. If one of your recruiting sources was an online job posting, you could be overwhelmed with dozens of responses. **When faced with a pile of resumes, we recommend sorting them into three stacks:**

- **Stack #1**: Resumes that are neat, professional, and highlight a job history that's consistent with what you are looking for in your ideal candidate. Your gut reaction when looking at the resumes in this pile is that you would like to know more about the person.

- **Stack #2**: Resumes that are neat and professional looking but don't mesh all that well with your open position. There may be some items of interest but not enough to make this individual a top prospect. These are ones you want to put on "hold" until you see what else comes through.

- **Stack #3**: Resumes with typos, misspellings, and a low-quality appearance or ones without relevant experience. These are the people you know up front you have no interest in interviewing.

Once you have your resumes sorted, contact the individuals in Stack #1 for a telephone screen. Send a ***"Thanks, but No Thanks"*** letter to the people in Stack #3. Keep Stack #2 on the back burner for a second look if you do not have a decent pool of candidates left after your first round of telephone screens.

When it comes to telephone screening, your primary goal is to see if the candidate lives up to his or her resume. Plan to spend no more than 10 minutes on the phone with each individual in Stack #1—any longer and you are probably moving into territory better covered in a face-to-face interview. **We recommend focusing your telephone screen on asking candidates to discuss two key things:**

"Tell me briefly about a couple of items from your resume you feel really highlight your professional accomplishments."

AND

"What about our company is most interesting to you?"

continued

Weeding Out Mismatches

What are you looking for in their answers? Primarily a sense that the resume accurately reflects the real person. Weak or vague answers to the first question above often indicate a gap. Also, strong candidates typically have researched your company and can pinpoint things that appeal to them along with areas where they think they can contribute.

At the conclusion of your telephone screen, ask yourself, ***"Do I want to meet this person and find out more?"*** If your response is positive, you can move forward and schedule a face-to-face interview. If you have reservations or feel lukewarm about the candidate, it is best not to commit to any future meetings.

Many companies ask candidates to take an assessment after a positive phone screen to further qualify them. The benefit is that you get an objective view of where prospects match and don't match with your position before you commit to any face-to-face interview time. Many candidates with excellent resumes and good presentations during telephone screens sometimes fall short when they are objectively assessed by a reliable test. So using a test earlier in your process might help you filter out less qualified candidates sooner rather than later.

We will look more closely at the types of pre-employment assessments and their uses in Step 4.

The Challenges of the Face-to-Face Screen

When we ask managers about which part of hiring they find most difficult, the most common response we hear is "interviewing." That is no surprise since most of them have never received any formal training in how to conduct an effective interview. More experienced managers may have picked up a few tricks over the years through trial and error, but many less-seasoned individuals state they have no real idea how to structure an effective interview.

Furthermore, they do not know how to ask great questions and, most importantly, how to determine if what they are hearing from and seeing in a candidate is indicative of what the person would be able to do if hired for the position.

What Does a Great Screening Interview Look Like?

From beginning to end, your screening process should be professional, well-organized and consistent. While managers need to be flexible since no two interviews (and no two candidates) will be exactly alike, they need to take a systematic approach that incorporates proven methods for structuring the conversation. Some steps are most effective if done at the start of the interview, while others will have more of an impact if they happen closer to the end. A polished interview has a well-defined opening, middle, and closing, and the manager is in control of the process all along the way.

In this section, we will focus on these three key components (opening, middle and closing) in relation to your first face-to-face meetings with candidates. This step is typically called a Screening Interview, and the objective of it is simple—you are trying to identify and screen out the obvious mismatches while also deciding which candidates you want to bring back for the next step of your hiring process.

Keeping this specific goal in mind is crucial. Too often managers start trying to decide during the first interview whether they want to hire the candidate, when all they need to figure out is, ***"Do I want to bring this person back for a closer look?"*** There is no way you will get enough information about the candidate during screening to determine whether you want to extend a job offer.

However, many times you will see clear-cut evidence you need to exit an individual from the process.

Make a Great First Impression

To get off to a good start and have a strong opening to your interviews, keep these tips in mind:

- **Select a quiet location.** Your candidate should have your undivided attention, so ringing telephones and beeping e-mail alerts are a no-no.
- **Treat your candidate as a guest.** Provide a comfortable chair, something to drink and a writing surface if possible.
- **Get out from behind your desk.** Try to find a less formal setting. An empty conference room can be an ideal location if there's no casual sitting area in your office.
- **Be prepared.** Make sure you have carefully reviewed the candidate's resume ahead of time and made notes regarding the particular items you want to discuss. Have a pad of paper and a pen ready for taking notes during the interview as well.
- **Start on time.** Don't keep your candidate waiting in the lobby while you "finish up a few more things."

continued

Make a Great First Impression

These steps may sound obvious, but over the years we have repeatedly seen managers get off to a very unprofessional start when conducting interviews because of a lack of preparation. They are not ready when a candidate arrives and begin scrambling around trying to wrap up e-mails and phone calls. They forget to let their team members know they should not be interrupted, so people keep knocking on the door or barging in. They try to simultaneously read over and highlight the candidate's resume while asking questions.

Remember: The screening interview is often the candidate's first impression of both you and your company. It has to be a positive one if you want to grab the interest of the strongest candidates. Remember your candidates are also deciding if they want to return for another look at you as well.

Taking Charge & Setting the Rules

Once you and your candidate are settled in your interview environment and have made some pre-interview small talk to break the ice, the next step is one of the most important ones for ensuring a successful first meeting: Take control of the interview.

How do you do this? By setting the rules.
Here's an example of an effective opener that does just that:

> ***"I really appreciate your coming by to meet with me today, and I want to make the most of our time together. To do that, I've made some notes on the things I saw on your resume that I'd like to know more about.***
>
> ***Why don't we start with those items, and when we're done I'll be happy to tell you more about this opportunity and answer any questions you have. How does that sound?"***

continued

Taking Charge & Setting the Rules

Establishing this format is vital: You are going to ask your questions first, and then you will answer the candidate's. Why this order? Because if you start the interview by telling candidates about the job, the company and what you are looking for in the person you plan to hire before you ask them questions, you will effectively be giving them the answers to the test before they take it.

A savvy candidate will merely tailor his or her responses to suit your needs, and before you know it you begin to think, ***"Wow, this person is exactly what I was looking for!***" Separating the truth from the sales pitch will be much more difficult later.

While we are on the subject of who talks when, it is worth mentioning the **80/20 rule for interviews**:

The candidate should be doing 80% of the talking, while the manager does 20%.

Most managers talk far too much in their interviews when what they really should be doing is listening. We also recommend aiming for a conversation, not an interrogation. The more comfortable and relaxed your candidate is, the more likely he or she will open up and speak candidly and honestly. This does not mean you cannot ask tough questions—you just need to frame them in a non-confrontational tone and preface them with a soft lead-in along the lines of, ***"What I really find interesting that you mentioned and would like to hear more about is..."***

continued

Speaking of Questions

When it comes to the questioning process, most people know to avoid asking closed-ended questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" response. However, what they do not realize is the importance of probing the responses they do get to their more open-ended questions.

A simple goal should be asking at least three follow-up questions for every open-ended one. For example, if you ask candidates to tell you the one thing they liked best about their most recent job and they respond by saying, ***"interacting with our customers,"*** you will need to probe by asking for examples, details, and explanations. This allows your candidate to expand on his or her answer and usually provides you with much clearer, more in-depth information. Most managers stop with the first question, never bothering to probe, and when they do, they leave a wealth of valuable insights on the table.

Where to Start

It helps most managers to structure their screening questions around the candidate's employment history, starting with his current or most recent job. **For example, using a candidate's resume as a guide, ask him to:**

- Walk you through a typical day in the position he currently holds (or most recently held).
- Explain how he performs (or performed) certain tasks.
- Discuss what activities he finds (or found) most enjoyable.
- Highlight what he likes (or liked) best about working with his current manager/company.
- Explain what he would change (or would have changed) about the position if he could.

Listen carefully and watch the candidate's body language. Does he smile and lean forward when he is talking about solving problems or being creative? Does he shift in his seat and seem to be trying to carefully phrase his response when you ask him about his manager? Pay attention to it all, and compare the information to what you need in your open position. If you avoided talking too much at the start of the interview and, therefore, haven't told the candidate the details of the open position, you will ideally be getting objective, honest responses, not answers geared toward what you might want to hear.

Work your way back through 3-4 jobs in this manner, and a clear picture of your candidate's likes and dislikes along with his strengths, challenges and growth will begin to appear.

How Long Should Screening Last?

Plan to spend about 45 minutes with candidates that have potential and that you want to learn more about. You do not have to spend that long with individuals you recognize are not right for the job—you can exit these people after 15-20 minutes. **However, once you have wrapped up your questions with a favorable candidate, ask yourself a simple question:**

"Would I like to take this person to the next step in my process?"

If the answer is ***"yes,"*** a strong closing is essential. Your strategy is a targeted "sell" of the opportunity to your candidate. At this point in the interview, it is common to see managers, now that they have finished with their questions, launching into a generic description of the job they are trying to fill that focuses on what they think makes it a great opportunity.

Unfortunately, this has nothing to do with what the candidate may be looking for, so it generates little excitement or interest.

A Strong Closing

Wrap up by telling the candidate that you think you have a good idea of what he or she is looking for, and here's how you believe your position will be a superb fit. Then hit the bullet points of the job and what the company has to offer that you know will be most appealing to the candidate. This **concise but targeted description** is compelling in getting your candidate to agree to take the next step in your process and can go a long way toward making your opportunity seem uniquely suited to his or her wants and needs.

This tactic is a way to distinguish yourself, your company and your open position from all the other options the candidate may be considering.

Once you have narrowed down your pool of candidates through the Screening Interview process to the 2-3 individuals you think are best suited for the job, you might want a second opinion. One of the best ways we know to get unbiased feedback will likely come from outside your company—an external pre-employment assessment.

Step 4: Assess Your Candidates

Interviews are great for understanding a person's skills, knowledge, and experience but they fall short when discerning a person's innate qualities. Innate qualities shape their personality, communication style, and work preferences. Those characteristics impact job fit and performance. Fortunately, assessments offer an unbiased, third-party perspective of a candidate's innate qualities.

An Objective, Third-Party Opinion

While even seasoned managers can be fooled by candidates who sell themselves well in the interview and give all the "right" answers, Personality and Cognitive Assessments are much more objective. In fact, most high-quality assessment tools have upward of a 90% accuracy rate and even employ methods which can alert managers to candidates who are trying to present themselves one way when, in fact, their natural traits indicate otherwise.

By answering a series of questions and working through a battery of tasks or activities, candidates provide information the assessment tool can use to create a profile of the individual's core personality traits and cognitive ability. Once hiring managers establish that profile, they typically receive a written summary along with details, all of which provide targeted insight into how the candidate is "hard-wired."

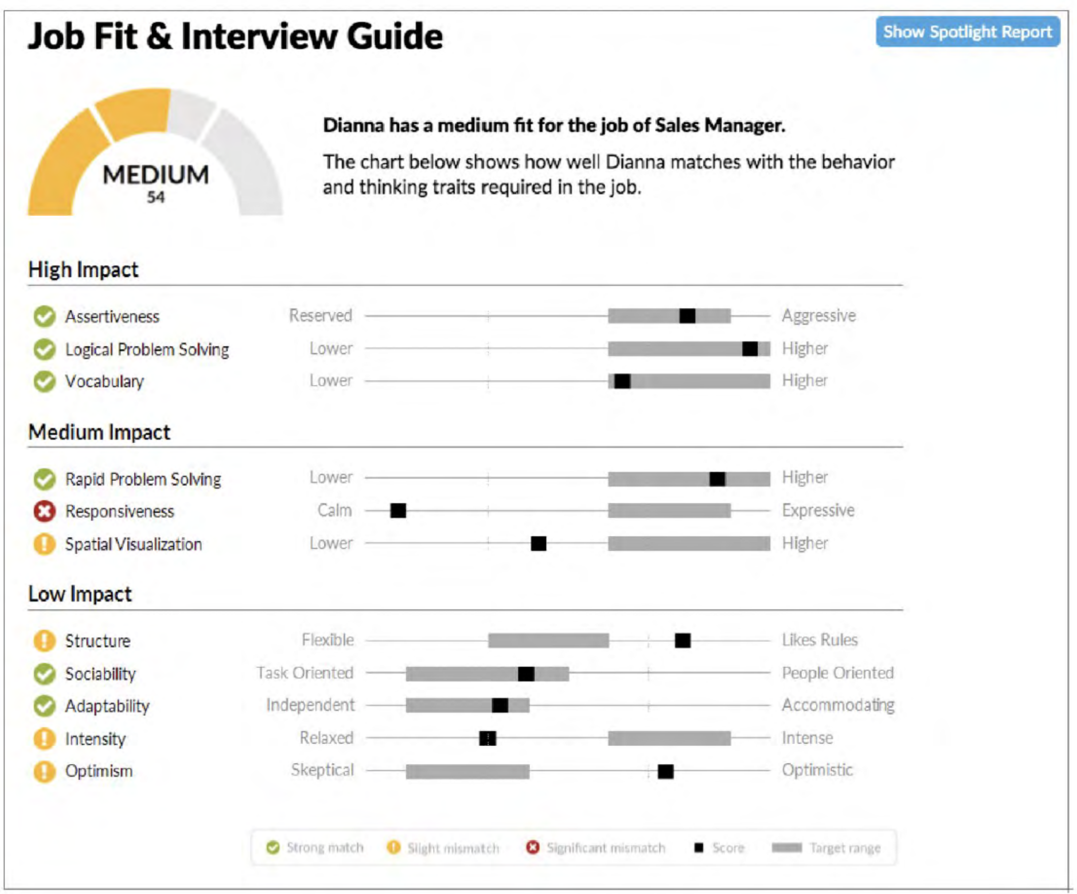
Identifying Hits & Misses

Many assessments on the market share similarities, however, one feature separates the most useful tools from the rest. This is the ability to identify not only the candidate's personality traits and cognitive abilities but to compare those qualities to the traits necessary for success in the position to which they are applying (See chart on the next page).

The best assessments ask hiring managers to provide information about the key job functions and the traits they need in an ideal candidate for the position. Some assessments go further by allowing you to test current employees in the role to determine which traits your top performers share. Doing so gives you a benchmark of the qualities that separate your best employees from your average ones. **This customized approach results in managers receiving summary reports that:**

- Confirm areas where the person fits
- Identify areas where they may not be compatible
- Raise questions for the manager to consider

Job/Person Match



(Chart sample modeled from the HighMatch Assessment)

Time & Money Well-Spent

Most quality assessments are available online and can be completed by the candidate in less than an hour. Results are often e-mailed back to the hiring manager within 60 minutes. Most reputable companies will allow you to try their system for free by administering the tool to an existing team member (or taking it yourself) to determine its accuracy and whether it will meet your needs.

Ultimately, when it comes to the price and time involved, most managers agree that assessments pay for themselves many times over if they can prevent even one suboptimal hire.

Over the years we have seen scores of managers avoid hiring mistakes through the judicious use of assessments. There are plenty of times when assessments validate a manager's thinking that a candidate is a good fit. However, there are also many other instances when an assessment report identifies a red flag that the manager had not seen during the screening process.

"If only I'd paid closer attention to the assessment instead of rationalizing that I could work around the mismatches," is a common lament we hear when a hiring mistake becomes apparent to a manager after the fact.

Predicting the Future

When we counsel managers dealing with performance issues, we always ask to see a copy of any assessment he or she might have on the problem individual. Many times the report, even if it is several years old, identifies the key traits in the candidate which are at the heart of the issue. **As a struggling manager recently summed up in one of our training classes:**

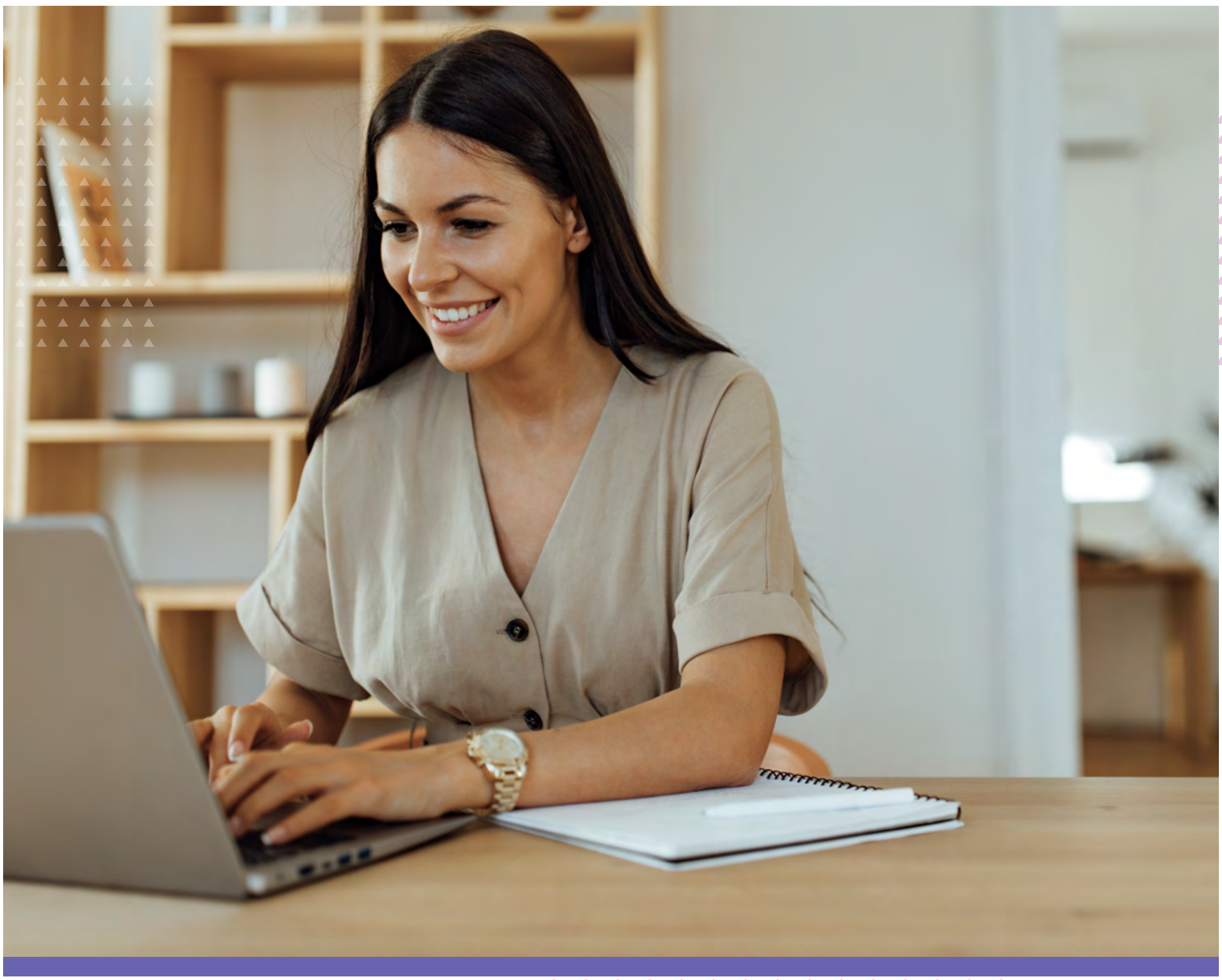
"The assessment fired a loud and clear warning shot that I might have this problem with her, but I just didn't want to hear it."

It is not uncommon for managers to lose their objectivity during the hiring process, sometimes because they genuinely like the individual and some of the things he or she has to offer. It can also happen when the manager is anxious to fill the position. An assessment tool is meant to provide balance, especially in those situations.

How Much Weight Does it Carry?

One final point to keep in mind when using assessments: They should be one element of your hiring process, not the sole decision-making tool. The good ones are very accurate and reliable in identifying the personality traits and cognitive abilities of a candidate. Moreover, personality and talent fit is one of the most crucial factors in whether an individual will be successful in a job.

However, these are not the only success factors. You also have to consider other elements of performance that will impact whether or not someone succeeds in a given role. Hiring Managers can only determine items from your Hiring Profile such as Background and Culture fit via an assessment tool so well—that is what the rest of the interview process is for, especially the next step.



Step 5: Check References

When we mention reference checking in our management training classes, the topic is invariably met with groans and rolled eyes. Why? Because most managers feel that they do not receive useful information from the references provided by candidates.

We hear grumbles of, ***"Most of them will not even return your call"*** and, "***Even if you do get them on the phone, they tell you they are not allowed to give you any information."*** Others complain that many references, fearful of liability, won't provide any useful input on a candidate's strengths and weaknesses. Some managers point out that many claim they are prohibited by company policy from giving out any information at all. Ultimately, managers confess they either put minimal time into checking references or skip this part of the hiring process altogether.

The Right Way to Check References

When done correctly, reference checking can provide insightful about a candidate. Even a highly skilled interviewer can only get so much directly from a candidate. What you need is an insight into what it was like to work with the person on a day-to-day basis. You need someone other than the candidate to give you input on what he or she does well and enjoys most vs. which tasks are less of a fit.

Important topics such as work ethic, ability to interact well with others and reliability are often best assessed by someone more objective than the candidate.

Unfortunately, the approach most managers take to reference checking is flawed for a number reasons. First, asking candidates to provide their references results in a biased input. Candidates hand-pick references because of their willingness to say great things about the candidate, not for their ability to provide unbiased, honest information.

Managers further impede their efforts by starting conversations with open-ended questions like, "***What were her strengths and weaknesses?***" or "***How would you describe his overall performance in the job?"*** Nothing shuts a reference down faster than feeling put on the spot by a tough question at the beginning of the call.

Worse, managers call the Human Resource to "verify employment" Verifying employment is NOT reference checking. HR department representatives can rarely if ever, do anything more than give you employment dates. This information will not give you the details required to assess candidate fit.

The 360° Method

HighMatch recommends a different approach. First, we suggest you rethink which individuals you target for reference information. We recommend a process we call 360° Reference Checking, **which essentially means you are contacting individuals the candidate has worked:**

- **Under** in the past (managers)
- **Alongside** in previous jobs (co-workers or peers) and, if possible,
- **Over** (employees, contractors, or customers).

This multi-level view can provide excellent information from people who've worked with your candidate in a variety of ways.

Finding Insightful References

So where do you get the names of these individuals? Ideally, if you found the candidate through networking, you should contact the person who originally referred you to him or her. Let your networking resource know you are very interested in the candidate and that you want to make sure your open position is a good fit for him or her. Ask your networking resource to recommend individuals the candidate worked with at the three levels and if, possible, to tell you how to get in touch with those people.

Another approach is to get the names directly from the candidate. Ask for the names of the managers he or she had in recent jobs, for the names of a couple of the people the candidate worked alongside for the most prolonged periods of time, and for the names of a few individuals he or she hired and/or supervised as employees or outside contractors. Try to get at least three names for each level along with telephone numbers and e-mail addresses if possible.

Asking the Right Questions the Right Way

When you contact these individuals, start by introducing yourself and letting the reference know that Jane Doe is a candidate for an opportunity at your company. Promptly mention that either Jane herself or your networking source suggested you contact the reference to ***"confirm a few details.***"

continued

Asking the Right Questions the Right Way

If the reference seems open to speaking with you, begin by asking a few simple, fact-based questions:

- *"How long did you and Jane work together?"*
- *"What was her role during that time?"*
- *"What types of activities or projects did the two of you work on together?"*

Once you have established some facts and gotten the person talking, you can segue into more subjective questions:

- *"What parts of the job did Jane seem to enjoy most?"*
- *"What aspects of her performance did you hear others praise or compliment?"*
- *"Which activities do you think were best suited to her strengths?"*
- *"What did you find to be the most productive work environment for her?"*
- *"What aspects of her performance did you see improve the most over the time you worked together?"*

Notice how these questions are all framed to solicit positives? That strategy is vital because you always want to give people the opportunity to speak favorably about a candidate first . Why? Because it is easier and less intimidating for most people to discuss another person's strengths.

Staying Positive About the Negatives

However, you certainly want to hear what input references have regarding the candidate's challenges. You will probably find you get more open feedback if you ask about the negative things after the positives, especially if you frame them carefully. Instead of asking, ***"What were Jane's weaknesses?"*** try something along the lines of ***"What one thing do you think Jane would have changed about the job if she could?"*** or ***"What parts of the job do you feel challenged Jane the most?"***

continued

Staying Positive About the Negatives

Another great technique is the **Two-Sided Question**, where you ask a question and then give the reference two choices on how to answer. Although neither answer is emphatically "right," one of them will be the answer you want. **For example:**

"If I had the choice to put Jane in a position where she would regularly be dealing with customers or one where she would largely work on her own with limited interaction with others, which do you think would be a better fit based upon your experiences with her?"

One other question that can yield useful input is, "***If I do hire Jane for this opportunity, what advice would you give me to help her get off to a good start?"*** All of these questions are very open-ended and give references ample opportunity to highlight your candidate's strengths and weaknesses if they are willing to provide input.

Avoiding the Most Common Mistakes

While you are focusing on approaching references the right way, it is critical to be aware of things you might unwittingly do that will, in fact, turn a potential source off. **These include mistakes such as:**

- **Indicating up front that you have already made your decision**

  ("We have brought Jeff in several times to interview for this position, the team loves him, and we think he would be perfect for the job, but I would like to get your opinion as well...").

- **Suggesting you are just going through the motions**

  ("Even though we have already decided to offer Mary the job, my HR department says I have to check some references on her before we close the deal...").

- **Pushing back on the information you do not want to hear**

  ("I know you said you did not think customer communication was one of his strong points, but I think with the training we offer and my support as his manager this would not be an issue here...")

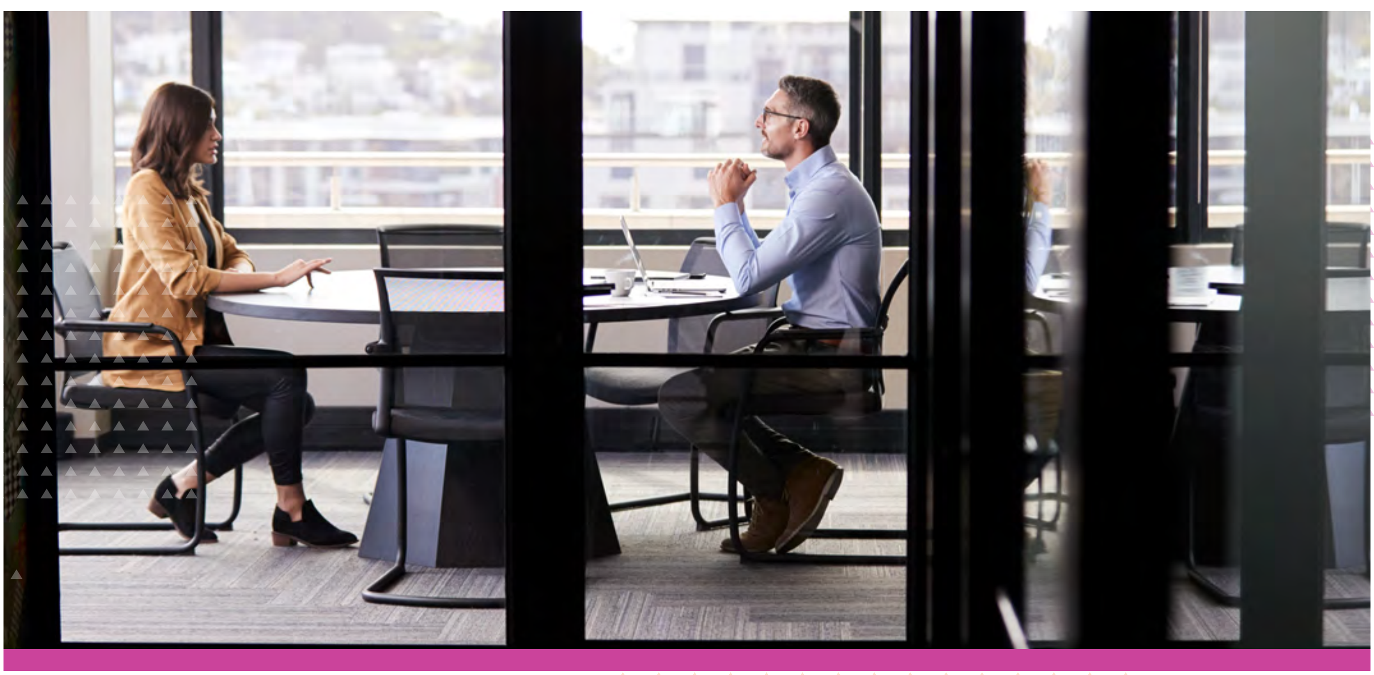
Your goal is to come across as open-minded and genuinely interested in any input or information the reference can provide. Sources are more likely to speak candidly if they feel you value their opinions and will factor them into your decision-making process.

Listening Between the Lines

There are times when the people you call just cannot or do not want to talk to you about the candidate. Even if they only answer a few of your questions with brief, non-specific answers, always pay attention to the reference's first reaction when you mention the name of the candidate. Did he or she respond warmly ***("Oh yes, I did work with him at company X!")*** or was there a long pause followed by something along the lines of an uncomfortable, ***"Oh, well, yeah, I can't really give you any information about him..."*** Listen for phrases such as, ***"Let me see, how can I put this..."*** or ***"I don't know the best way to say this but..."***

If someone is reluctant to talk or evasive in his or her answers, always ask if there is anyone else the person can recommend you contact or if he or she would be willing to speak to you off the record. Be sure to let references know that any information they can provide is very beneficial and could help you ensure your opportunity is the best possible fit for the candidate.

Ultimately, effective reference checking requires calling the right people, asking the right questions and openly listening to what people have to say. Look for patterns in the information you receive, and weigh it against what you have seen in your face-to-face meetings with the candidate as well asany insight you received from your pre-employment assessment. If it is done effectively, reference checking should hopefully help you put a few more pieces of the puzzle in place as you move toward really getting to know your candidate.



Step 6: Conduct a Great Secondary Interview

At this juncture, most managers have a sense of which candidates they would like to bring back for a closer look. Ideally, a small but solid group will stand out and will have checked many of your boxes: Strong resume, engaging telephone and initial screening interviews, positive Assessment results, and good reference feedback. Now that you have filtered out the non-candidates, you are ready for yourfinal round of information gathering.

The secondary interview should be much longer than your initial screening interview and will cover a lot more ground. How long should it last? Ideally, around three to four hours. While that seems like a long time, consider that companies bring candidates back an average of 2-3 times for secondary interviews, which typically equals roughly 3 hours of interview time in the end. **The problem is that multiple short interviews are not nearly as effective as one extended interview.**

A Consolidated Effort is Best

Over the course of a 3-4 hour interview, the typical candidate becomes more and more comfortable with the interview process and the people conducting it. As rapport builds candidates get increasingly comfortable opening up and talking at length about their accomplishments, experiences, preferences, and goals for the future. They stop trying to maintain their "interview persona," and speak more candidly. The longer candidates talk, the more they reveal.

"Fatigue Factor" is another benefit of an extended interview. Candidates come to the meeting full of energy and poised to sell themselves, yet, over time this energy begins to ebb, and it becomes harder for them to stick to their script of prepared responses. Usually, toward the middle or end of the second hour, you will notice candidates' answers become more spontaneous, less thought-out.
They will say things they had not planned to say.

This type of candid response is precisely what you want. Over and over managers have told us that the third hour of the interview was the most valuable in the whole process. It is when you have the best opportunity to truly see a candidate's strengths, weaknesses, and personality. It is not uncommon toward to hear candidates say, ***"I can't believe I'm about to say this but…"*** or "I ***probably shouldn't admit this but…"*** Often their answers confirm the profile of the candidate you have been establishing along the way, making you feel more confident you know what you would be getting if you hired the person. Sometimes you learn new things about the candidate. Most importantly, doubts you may have had regarding "red flags" can emerge as full-blown issues that are impossible to brush aside as "no big deal." A long format secondary interview helps you understand what the individual would or would not ring to the open position.

Getting Organized

Once managers understand the benefits of a longer secondary interview, their concerns shift to how to structure such a big block of time. Many are especially curious about how they can incorporate other managers and/or employees into the process. In most companies the top candidates interview with at least two or three other people apart from the hiring manager.

This is helpful not only because it allows different people to engage with candidates and offer feedback, but it also affords candidates the opportunity to meet with a variety of team members and get a clear sense of the culture, work environment, and group dynamics. When done correctly, having multiple interviewers adds value to the decision-making process and can bring objectivity as well as increase buy-in.

Unfortunately, this step is frequently disjointed and cumbersome rather than smoothly coordinated.

Too often additional interviewers are pulled in randomly and/or at the last minute and are unprepared. When this happens, the candidate is usually asked the same questions by different people or spends a good deal of time listening to the other party explain what he or she does at the company ***("Well, I'm not really sure what Bill wants us to talk about, so maybe I should just tell you about my job and department...").***

To avoid these pitfalls, we recommend that you start by carefully choosing your interviewers based on their ability to add a unique perspective to the process. **Effective roles for additional interviewers include:**

The Technical Expert

This interviewer is helpful in asking questions that can determine a candidate's expertise in critical job functions, especially if the hiring manager lacks the knowledge to delve into the area. For example, if you are interviewing for a position that needs substantial experience with a specific software program but don't use the application yourself, you likely will not know what questions to ask the candidate or how to determine if their answers are accurate. A technical expert can conduct this portion of the interview and likely gain a good insight into the individual's competency in this area.

The Peer Review

Hiring managers often ask one or two current team members to meet with candidates. Ideally, you want employees whose judgment you trust, who are positive about the company and your department's work, and who perform at a high level. These individuals are often well-suited to identifying whether a candidate will be a good fit for the current team and the company culture. Also, if they have high standards for their work, they will typically be focused on making sure potential hires have the ability to be top performers as well.

continued

The More Experienced Manager

For managers who are new to the hiring process or for those who have made mistakes in the past, it is a good idea to have a seasoned manager who has a strong hiring track record meet with your candidates. These managers ask great questions, listen well, and know how to avoid common mistakes. They may pick up on things you miss or raise issues you have not considered.

Once you have selected your additional interviewers and arranged for them to meet your candidate, it is crucial that you take the time to prepare them. Start by reviewing the candidate's resume, Assessment results and the highlights of your initial interviews and reference checking. Provide an overview of your thoughts on the individual's strengths and challenges, and discuss what specific topics you want the interviewer to cover. Identify any concerns you have that you would like feedback on post-interview, and strategize on how to explore these areas during the meeting. These steps ensure your interviewer will have an effective game plan and, therefore, be able to give you helpful input afterward.

The 3D Interview

Since you will be meeting for an extended period of time, consider moving into different situations that allow you to spend time with the candidate in a variety of circumstances. We call this **3D Interviewing**. This enables managers to see different sides of the candidate's personality and behavioral traits.

A 3D interview looks at a candidate from these vantage points:

Professional View

This is the classic, formal interview scenario which usually takes place in your office or a similar business location. This view lets you assess the candidate's professional persona in areas like presentation (dress, manners, communication skills), preparation for the interview, punctuality, and general fit with a professional environment. Most interviews start here, and you could have one of your secondary interviewers spend time with the candidate in this setting.

Environmental View

During this portion of the interview, you get the candidate out of the formal interview setting (likely your personal office or a conference room) and continue talking with him or her while moving to environments relevant to the job. This could mean conducting a tour of your office or facility, taking the candidate to one of your retail or field locations, walking them through a job or project site or driving them around to see some of your other offices or locations. This step often changes the tone of the interview and shifts it into a more informal conversation. Even though you are still asking questions, you will see candidates loosen up and start talking more openly.

Social View

This view puts candidates in a social setting where you can see how they interact with others. Many managers arrange for one or two of their team members to take the candidate out for coffee or lunch during this portion of the interview. This is presented as an opportunity for the candidate to meet current employees, ask questions, and get a feel for the work environment. Likewise, the team members get to know the candidate in a low-key setting and often see a new side of the individual.

continued

Social View *(continued)*

The variety of people and places results in a dynamic interview that is interesting and comfortable for the candidate but is also full of opportunity to gather more and better information towards your hiring decision. Your next job is to divide the content you want to cover between the various interviewers and locations.

We recommend focusing on three distinct topics:

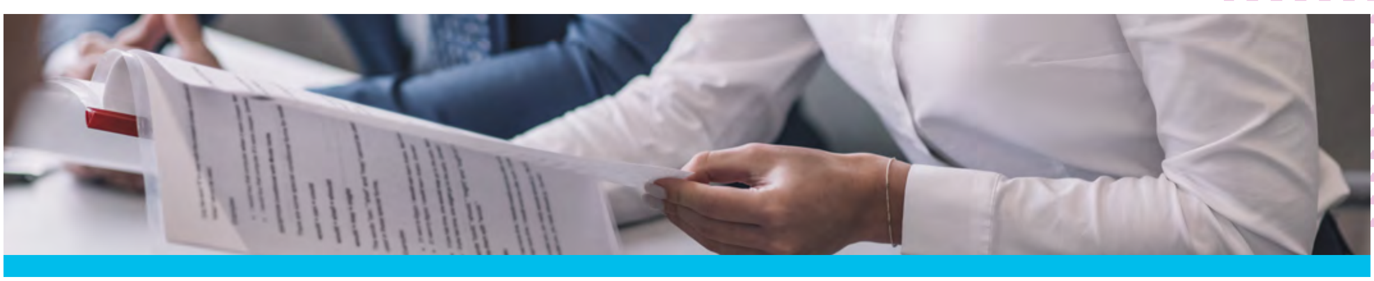
- Review of the assessment profile results.
- Deeper investigation of the candidate's history.
- Future-oriented questions to determine what the candidate is truly looking for in his or her next job, manager and company.

Sharing the Assessment Results

Reviewing the assessment results at the beginning of the Secondary Interview is helpful because it offers an avenue for **behavior-based interviewing techniques**. One way to cover this topic effectively would be for the hiring manager to go over the results with the candidate when he or shefirst arrives for the interview as part of the "Professional View."

You do not need to go over the entire profile, just the highlights. The key is to use the statements from the assessment results to get candidates talking about how they have used specific personality traits and talents in the past. For example, if the profile indicates your candidate has strong problem-solving skills, ask her to tell you about the most recent problem she faced in her job and walk you through how she resolved it. Ask her to go into detail, so you get a sense of how she usesthis talent.

If the profile rates your candidate high in sociability, ask him to tell you about how he regularly interacts with peers, customers and team members in other departments. Again, dig for details, and keep asking questions until you feel the central points in the profile have been validated as "true" by the candidate through his examples and stories. If you are using Berke as your assessment tool, each report you receive will come with an Interview Guide that walks you through this process and provides questions to help you explore the candidate's traits in more detail.



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Revisiting History

During the second section of the interview, you should revisit the candidate's job history.

In the screening interview, you likely spent time on their most recent jobs and briefly discussed the individual's primary responsibilities in each one. **With more time, you can get more detailed information by asking the candidate to:**

- Walk you through a typical day in that job.
- Explain step-by-step how he or she executed certain tasks (e.g., how she resolved a customer complaint, how he put together a budget for his department, how she developed a new system).
- Tell you about the managers they worked for, what they enjoyed about their relationship with each person and what they would have changed if they had had the opportunity.
- Describe their most significant contribution to the position.
- Talk about the one thing they wished they would been able to do but could not.

Use this in-depth information to continue to evaluate what your candidates have done in the past against what you would be asking them to do. This portion of the interview could also include questions by current team members or experienced managers and could be done during either a tour (Environmental View) or during lunch or coffee (Social View).

What's Next?

Once you feel you have thoroughly explored the candidate's assessment profile and his or her history, the final third of the interview can focus on "what's next" for the candidate. **Ask them to:**

- Describe their "wish lists" for their next position.
- Identify the activities where they would like to spend the bulk of their time.
- Explain where they would like to use their talents.
- Discuss where they would like to learn and grow personally.
- Describe the type of manager they want to work for and the relationship they would like to have with this individual.
- Outline what's important to them in finding a company that's a good fit for them (What woull the culture be like? What kind of vision and values would it have? What would the day-to-day work environment be like?).

continued

What's Next?

While your candidate is answering, listen very carefully.
Then ask yourself a simple yet crucial question:

"How does what this person is describing fit with what we have to offer?"

Your honest answer has everything to do with whether or not you will be able to meet this person's needs, whether the individual is truly a viable candidate, and how he or she compares to the others you are considering. Additionally, now is the time to do a thorough debrief with your other interviewers. Ask them to walk you through the highlights of their time with each candidate, review the positives and negatives they uncovered, and give you a general sense of how they see each potentially fitting with the job, the company and the rest of the team.

For this to be effective, it is crucial that you be honestly willing to listen. Too often we see managers half-heartedly ask for feedback because they have already decided what they want to do. They sometimes minimize concerns others express or downplay the potential impact of a red flag. If the primary goal of asking others to participate in your interview process is to get unbiased input from people whose opinions you trust, you have to be open to hearing what they have to say, even if it is at odds with own views.

After talking with your interviewers, you will have a clear picture of who each of your candidates is, especially their strengths, weaknesses, goals, and preferences. You know each person's work history—what they have been either successful or unsuccessful doing in the past, which is a fundamental predictor of what they will likely do in the future. You have insight into your candidates' personalities and talents, where they are predisposed to both excel and struggle. You have had multiple opportunities to evaluate their styles and get a sense of what they would be like to work alongside on a daily basis and how they will fit with the rest of your team.

Most importantly, you can evaluate what each has to offer against your other top candidates and what he or she might bring to the table. With this wealth of knowledge, you are ready for the last step in the process—choosing your top candidate and making an offer.

continued

Step 7: Close the Deal

For most managers, this final step is loaded with emotions and questions. They may feel relieved that they are almost finished with the process, excited to have found someone they believe is a great fit or anxious because they still have concerns. **And although by now they are finished asking questions of their candidates, they likely still have a few for themselves:**

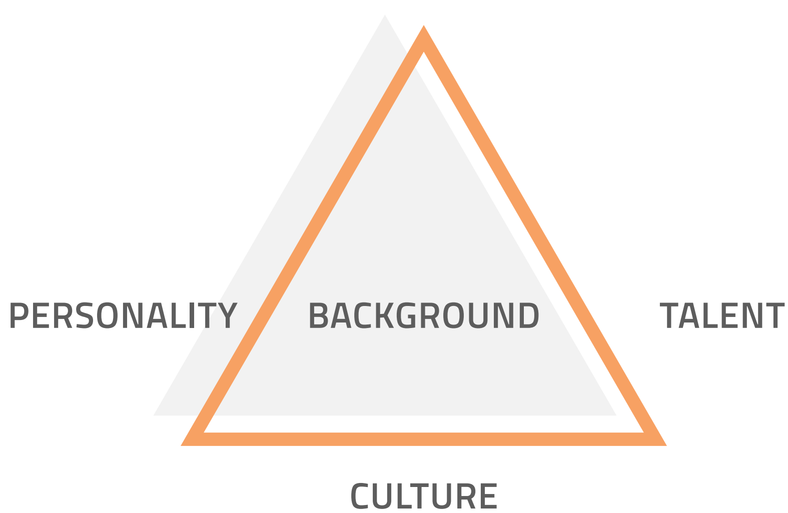
- ***"I have the facts, but what's my gut instinct telling me?"***
- ***"Do I clearly see the candidate's strengths and weaknesses?"***
- ***"Looking at my candidates, which person is really the best fit for the job?"***
- ***"What if I offer the job and my top choice doesn't accept?"***

In our training classes, we remind managers that if they have diligently followed the previous steps, then they have the information they need to make a decision. While it is still possible for them to make a hiring mistake, they have eliminated many of the risk factors through the thoroughness of their process. Managers trying our approach for the first time find they know more about their candidates than they have in previous hiring situations.

They are well-informed, and they have to put their emotions and questions in perspective and close the deal.

Making Your Choice

So how do you choose? Start your decision-making process by pulling out a tool we discussed in Step #1: **The Ideal Candidate Triangle**.



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Making Your Choice

Using a scale of 1-10 (with one being low and ten being high), rate each candidate on the four categories. When doing this, refer to the specific criteria you established in your Hiring Profile. If you have had other managers or employees interview your candidates, ask them to rate each individual as well. Comparing and debating any differences between your ratings and the ratings of the other interviewers gives you a great opportunity to really analyze each prospect's strengths and weaknesses.

When rating candidates, here are a few things to keep in mind:

For **Background** *(Skills, Knowledge & Experience)*...

...consider what you have learned about your candidate during your interviews. Did the individual provide detailed explanations and examples which indicate he or she will be coming into the job with the level of basic qualifications you need?

For **Personality & Talent** Compatability...

...use your assessment results and your interview information to establish how well each candidate fits with the personality traits and talents you established were crucial for job success in the beginning. Where is the candidate a good match? Where are you compromising? In the areas of compromise, can you accept the outcome if the person is perennially weak in this part of the job?

Finally, take a big picture look at how well each candidate will potentially fit with your **Company Culture**...

Can you see the individual working to achieve your organization's mission and goals? Are your company's core values ones this person has indicated are inherently important to him or her as well? Can you picture the candidate becoming a supportive element in your existing team and working in conjunction with those individuals? Don't underestimate the importance of fit in this area. The root of many sub-par hires is that while the candidate was a great match for the job, he or she was a poor fit for the company.

Once you have rated all your candidates using the above criteria, it is time to take a step back and ask yourself the question this entire process has prepared you to answer:

"Which candidate is truly the best fit for this job?"

It is crucial that this individual sincerely be an excellent choice, not merely ***"the best of what you have to choose from."*** In general, if you average all four categories of the Ideal Candidate Triangle, you should be aiming for candidates who score "7" or higher. You want to genuinely feel that this person will add value to your team and that you can commit to doing everything you will need to do to give him or her the tools to succeed.

After the hire, you will be spending time and energy training, developing, coaching, and integrating this new team member. Which individual can you see yourself committing to do those things with, feeling confident that your efforts will pay off? Make your choice with confidence, and then prepare to close the deal.

The Last - But Most Important - Meeting

We recommend bringing your candidate back in for a face-to-face offer, if possible. Not only is this more "personal," it gives you the opportunity to visually see the person's initial reaction to your offer and address any potential concerns or hesitations on his or her end. Unfortunately, managers who have never been trained in effective closing skills often stumble when presenting the job. The most frequent mistake we observe at this point, is a **weak closing** and it looks something like this:

> ***"We really want to hire you for this job. Do you want it? If so, here's the offer letter for you to sign."***

A weak closing is a missed opportunity to make your company and your job, stand out from the rest. Your offer process should be just as professional and well-thought-out as all the previous steps. If your candidate is looking at offers from other companies, you want your job to stand out from the rest.

"Here's What I Have Learned So Far"

When the candidate comes in for this final meeting, begin by thanking the individual for all the time and effort he or she has invested in your process. Reiterate you are committed to only hiring people you believe you can help be outstandingly successful in the job.

Next, do a targeted sell by highlighting the things you have learned about the candidate that you think are most significant. **This would follow along the lines of:**

> ***"I feel like I've really gotten to know you well during our time together. I think I understand what you're looking for in your next career opportunity."***

THEN SUMMARIZE THOSE KEY POINTS:

> ***"You're at your best when you have the ability to solve problems, make decisions, and divide your time almost 50/50 between working with others and focusing independently on tasks. You appreciate a lot of structure in the form of solid systems and processes, and you excel at meeting deadlines and completing projects within established budget parameters. I also see that your next opportunity needs to offer you the chance to train others, expand your knowledge and skills with regard to technology, and work on assignments that will stretch your creativity and leadership."***

continued

"Here's What I Have Learned So Far"

This summary will make the candidate feel like you genuinely know them and understand their wants and needs. It grabs their attention, and their body language will often indicate interest and excitement.

AND HERE IS WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU:

Once you have outlined what you have learned about the individual, the next step is to explain how the job you have to offer is a solid fit for the person:

> ***"Based on what I just described, here's where I think the position we have here is ideal for you..."***

You do not need to go into every detail of the Job Description. Instead, reiterate the essential tasks and activities that the candidate will likely do best and enjoy most. Do not forget to reinforce what the company has to offer that the candidate has indicated is important to him or her, whether it be advancement opportunities, a positive work atmosphere, or terrific training and mentoring. **Project the candidate into the job by saying:**

> ***"In fact, I can really see you excelling in this job, working as part of our team, being part of our key initiatives this year, achieving your own professional goals..."***

At this pivotal moment, you undoubtedly have your candidate's full attention and interest. So while it might be tempting to finish with something like, "So, what do you think? Are you interested in taking the job?" we suggest a different, more effective approach. **Begin by stating:**

> ***"With everything I just said in mind, I truly believe this opportunity is a great one for you and your career. If I commit to doing everything I need to do as your manager to help you succeed in this role, will you accept our offer and commit to doing everything you need to do to be successful in this job?"***

Then present the Offer Letter outlining the details to the candidate.

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Getting to *"Yes"*

This is the most effective way to get to "yes" with a candidate. While he or she may still have a few questions or want time to look over your written offer, your ability to present the opportunity in this way preempts many of the doubts and concerns that prevent a candidate from signing right away. Most importantly, when a candidate does step forward and accept the job by answering "yes" to your offer, it is with a very high level of enthusiasm and commitment.

This attitude and determination will make for a successful integration into the company, the team, and the new role once the person begins working for you. That is the central ingredient in making sure you get the ultimate payoff for your efforts—transitioning your Great New Hire into your Great New Team Member as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

Final Thoughts

Our recommended approach is neither quick nor easy:

- It requires taking the time to think objectively about what you want and need in the person you hire (both short-term and long-term) rather than re-hiring the same type of person who held the job before.
- It requires putting forth the effort to get candidates to open up and show you who they really are and what they really want.
- It requires being willing to acknowledge red flags, doubts and ***"things that just don't feel quite right"*** in order to pass on candidates you should not hire.

Most importantly, **it requires an unwavering commitment to hiring outstanding people who will strengthen your team and make your job as a manager easier, better, and more fulfilling every day.**

When you think about it this way, it is a little easier to see hiring as a unique opportunity, not just a tiresome, frustrating task. Outstanding managers recognize that a large part of their own success is defined by the people around them. Let hiring be your path to surrounding yourself with the best.

The HighMatch Assessment

HighMatch, formerly Berke, began in 2004 with the mission to create a better assessment that would accurately predict job performance.

HighMatch engagements begin with job benchmarking and the creation of **hiring profiles**, which outline the traits that are required to succeed in every job. After candidates take the assessment, you receive a **report** that provides clear, actionable guidelines to help you make great hiring decisions.

We believe that hiring the right people transforms companies.

ABOUT HIGHMATCH:

Our Talent Insights Platform combines modular cognitive and behavioral assessments with a massive library of skills testing, and our managed services arm provides a range of outsourced services to resource-strapped HR teams.

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