



But They Looked So Good On Paper!?!

You hired the person who looked perfect on paper and they turned out to be a disaster. Like the TV ad says: Buzzer!

Every business wants to find – and hire – the best people. As has been said elsewhere: Mediocre employees cost you a bundle, but great ones can make you rich.

But have you ever wondered why hiring staff can seem so hit-and-miss? Or why people who look great on paper and come across well in an interview don't always work out? You're certainly not alone if you have.

Bad hires are not only frustrating for employers, they're extremely costly. For instance, a conservative estimate of the direct costs of hiring the wrong person for a \$40,000-a-year role – including salary, benefits, hiring costs, training, temporary cover and litigation – is between \$31,000 and \$34,000. And that's before you factor in possible indirect costs, such as management time and effort (and stress!) and the likely impact on productivity, staff morale, customer satisfaction and company reputation. The sky is truly the limit.

A big enough blunder might even land you in the 'Employment Hall of Shame' along with the person who checked John Davey's (remember him?) CV for Māori Television.

While finding the right person for a job is seldom easy, many employers make things more difficult for themselves by relying on only one or two selection methods. Because no one method is – even remotely close to being – infallible, the surest approach is to use a range of methods, including: Good application forms, CV, interviewing, reference checking, psychometric testing, role-playing, work samples and security and credit checks.

Whatever the mix of methods, interviewing will always be an important element. An element that's surprisingly easy to get wrong.

One of the keys to getting the most from an interview is to ask about the candidate's experiences (e.g., what did you do when...?) rather than about hypothetical situations (e.g., what would you do if...?). This approach is known as behavioural interviewing and is based on a simple, yet powerful, principle: The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.

The advantages of behavioural interviewing include:

- Gaining an insight into how a candidate actually performs;
- Minimising interviewer bias;
- Making it less likely the interviewer will take on the role of 'amateur psychologist' (i.e., reading too much into responses, mannerisms, etc.); and
- Making it difficult for the candidate to embellish their work history.

Designing effective behavioural questions is as simple as 1-2-3 (S-B-O, actually):

- Situation – what was the candidate faced with?
- Behaviour – what did they do?
- Outcome – what was the result?

Tips for behavioural interviewing include:

- Asking some questions that link directly to the candidate's work experience;
- Giving the candidate sufficient time to think of specific examples;
- Asking probing questions to get at the details (e.g., what, when, why and how?); and
- Asking for contrary evidence (e.g., tell me about a time when things didn't work out so well?).

Put yourself in the best position to hire the right person for the job, first time. And, just as importantly, avoid hiring the person who's going to cost you a bundle. Otherwise, you'll be saying 'Bugger' again!



By **Work Matters**, an Albany-based training and consulting company specialising in human resource management and employment law.

Telephone 414 2131, www.workmatters.co.nz