

## The Ins and Outs of Pre-Employment Testing

One of the biggest challenges employers face is trying to understand the actions of their employees. Hiring would be much easier if employers could predict how people would actually perform. Teams would be more effective if management took the time to learn the strengths of each member. Communication would be enhanced if managers valued each employee's unique style. Fortunately, employers can address some of these issues by using pre-employment assessments.

### What is an assessment?

An assessment is any test or procedure used to measure an individual's employment or career-related qualifications and interests. There are many types of assessments, including traditional knowledge and ability tests, inventories, subjective procedures, and projective instruments.

### What is the purpose of an assessment?

Employers utilize assessments for a variety of reasons including selection, placement, promotion, career counseling, and training. Assessments measure the abilities, skills, work styles, and vocational interests and in some cases can predict successful job performance, managerial potential, career success, job satisfaction, and tenure.

### Why should your organization consider conducting pre-employment assessments?

- ▶▶ Current selection or placement procedures result in poor hiring decisions
- ▶▶ Employee productivity is low
- ▶▶ Employee errors have serious financial, health, or safety consequences
- ▶▶ There is high employee turnover or absenteeism
- ▶▶ Present assessment procedures do not meet current legal and professional standards

### What should you expect?

In order to successfully implement a testing program, it is critical to be purposeful in your approach. You must know what you hope to accomplish and be sure that you have a clear understanding of what needs to be measured and for what purpose. Remember that all tests are subject to errors, both in measuring and predicting performance. You should not expect any test or procedure to measure a personal trait or ability with perfect accuracy for every single person, nor should you expect any test or procedure to be completely accurate in predicting performance. It is important not to rely too much on any one test to make decisions.

### What are the legal concerns?

At the heart of matter, an employer must ensure instruments are unbiased and fair to all groups. Some things to consider when administering assessments:

- ▶▶ Employers should assess and make decisions based on job-relevant knowledge, skills, ability, and other characteristics, not on race, sex, religion, ethnicity, age, or disability.
- ▶▶ Because of ADA requirements, employers may need to make the test site accessible or use an alternative testing procedure. They cannot make medical inquiries or administer

medical examinations prior to making a job offer (see the recent 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit case of *Karraker v. Rent-A-Center, Inc.*, no. 04-2881, June 14, 2005).

- ▶ Employers should read and understand the implications of the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (see [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov) to read the code). The guidelines clearly state that it is unlawful to use a test or selection procedure that creates adverse impact, unless justified. Adverse impact occurs when there is a substantially different rate of selection in hiring, promotion, or other employment decisions that work to the disadvantage of members of a race, sex, or ethnic group.

#### **What are best practices for effective administration?**

- ▶ Ensure administration staff is properly trained
- ▶ Ensure that testing conditions are suitable for all test takers
- ▶ Provide reasonable accommodation in the assessment process for people with disabilities
- ▶ Maintain confidentiality of assessment results
- ▶ Properly handle test anxiety
- ▶ Testing unionized employees may be a mandatory subject of collective bargaining
- ▶ Ensure scores are interpreted properly
- ▶ Maintain assessment instrument security

#### **What sorts of personality tests are available?**

Psychology Today magazine reports that personality testing is a \$400 million industry with more than 2,500 tests on the market. The tool you select must logically tie to job performance, have external reliability and validity, and put in context for the position being analyzed. There are many choices that could lead your organization down the path of legal liability, so be sure to involve your labor counsel.