

Getting the Right People on the Right Seat on the Bus

Written by: Scott Humphrey, Marketing Manager, Shaw Flooring Alliance and reprinted with permission from the Floor Focus.

In a recent meeting in Houston, Texas, I gathered with a group of key floor covering dealers to discuss issues that impacted their success. Of course the typical challenges were mentioned: driving retail traffic, advertising, economic concerns, price increases, installation, distribution, etc. In order to drill down and discover the underlying issues, I like to ask a question that takes people away from the typi-



cal business focus; a question like, "What keeps you up at night?" The answer to this question is almost always people related. The group overwhelmingly responded,

"Help me hire the right people."

True leaders want to know that they not only have the right people on the bus, but that they have the right people on the right seat on the bus. And for good reason, the latest research from the American Management Association calculates the cost of losing an employee is 30 percent of that former employee's annual salary. Others show it to be as high as 1 1/2 times the salary of the former employee. This doesn't even calculate the cost of those employees who decide to quit and stay. They come to work

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Right *(from page 7)*

every day, but you would be better off if they didn't. Inside they quit some time ago. They are going through the motions and probably spreading their "I'm not happy here" venom, everywhere they go.

In 1990, after spending a few years as an outside sales rep, Shaw asked me to head up their sales recruiting/hiring process. During the next 8 years I interviewed some 10,000 potential candidates, ultimately making hundreds of offers to potential sales professionals. I came to realize that in most cases the interviewing process is severely flawed. It is focused on hiring, but not necessarily on hiring the right candidate.

One day while I was in a bookstore looking for a book to hone my interviewing skills, I was surprised to see several books on how to get through the interview. Books like *Getting the Job You Really Want*, by Michael Farr, give detailed instructions on how to make the right impression during the interview. I was further surprised to find that on many college campuses, Placement Centers offer classes on "Landing the Right Job". These classes do help students determine the jobs that match their strengths. Unfortunately, they also teach students how to answer interview questions. That's right, students and applicants are trained to give the answers we want to hear, but not necessarily the answer that truly reflect their feelings. For example, take the often-asked question, "What do you consider your greatest weakness?" Any trained interviewer will take this potential negative question and turn it to a positive by saying, "My greatest weakness is that I work too hard."

In this article, I want to give you some practical advice on interviewing to help you get through the fluff. This information is sure to save you time and money, by helping you hire the right candidate the first time.

1. Create A Job Description

If you haven't defined the position you are hiring for, you are most likely hiring based on likeability. There are many likable people out there that are not suited for their current position. Take the time to identify the job responsibilities. It was standard practice for me to ask the applicant to read the job description. I would follow this step by asking if there were any reason why they could not perform the responsibilities of the job. I would then have them sign the bottom signifying that they understood and were able to, and if hired, would perform the job responsibilities as defined in the job description. Among other things, this was powerful defense if I ever had disciplinary problems after the hire. I would simply pull out the signed job description and show them where they had agreed that they could and would perform the agreed upon actions.

To create a job description, simply jot down what you are hiring the person to do. If you are filling an existing job, think about what the previous employee was responsible for and add in anything you would have changed about their job responsibilities. If you have others currently doing the same job, have them jot down what they do on a daily basis. This also gives them some ownership in the hiring process and assures them that the next person will carry their fair share of the workload. In addition, job descriptions are easily found on the internet, especially through job search companies like monster.com.

2. Involve Your Existing Employees

It is never a good idea to make the hiring decision a solo decision. The longer a position has been open, the more desperate we are to fill a void, the more likely we are to see what we want to see; to overlook the weaknesses and exaggerate the strengths. I would recommend that you set a standard for your hiring decisions. Our standard at Shaw was that each applicant had to be interviewed by three people and all had to agree



that this was a good hire before we would make an offer to the applicant. After all, anyone can have one good interview.

But having multiple interviewers is not the main reason for involving other employees. Employees that interview a candidate, and approve them, feel a sense of responsibility for the success of that person. They are more likely to encourage them and hold them accountable to the standard you have set for your employees and your workplace. I've been on both sides of this. One manager made it a point to involve the entire team in a hiring decision. Another made the decision alone and then announced it to the team. Just think about it. Which candidate would you have more of a vested interest in?

3. Ask Behavioral Questions

This may be the biggest change from the way you interview today, but by far the most beneficial. There is an old adage that I have never forgotten from my recruiting days. It states, "The best predictor of future performance is past performance". With that said, the question is not what a candidate would do. The question is what a candidate has done. So instead of starting your questions with "What would you do..." you now gather your information by saying, "Tell me about a time..." Candidates are not trained to interview this way. You get a picture of the real person.

Follow this format. Ask them to tell you about a situation where they had to display a quality or job skill that you deem to be essential. Follow this question by asking what action they took (What did you do?). Next, ask them to share with you the outcome (What happened?). Finally, ask them what they would change if they had the situation to live over again. Making mistakes in their past should not exclude them from the job. Not learning from those mistakes should.

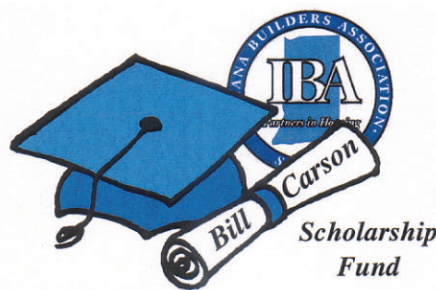
Be prepared, since this is not the normal method of interviewing, candidates will still try to tell you what they would do. When this happens, just state, "I appreciate your willingness to share with me what you would do, but I really want to hear about a specific situation where you have done this."

4. Read Their Body Language

It is easier to mislead with words than it is with actions. It is important that you watch the candidate's reaction as they answer the questions. Body shifts like crossing the legs or rubbing their hands together could indicate deception. Dr Albert Moravian at UCLA did research to determine why people trust others. He found out that: 7 percent of trust is established through the words that we say; 38 percent comes from the way we say those words, the tone of voice or inflections we use; but 55 percent of trust is established through the body language we observe. It is important that we do more than interview the candidate. We must also evaluate them for visual responses.

When you consider the cost of a bad hire, and you look at the high rate of turnover in our industry, making the right hiring decision should be one of our primary objectives. This is not an exhaustive discourse on hiring the right candidate, but these four steps helped Shaw reduce our turnover in the early nineties from nearly 20 percent to less than 10 percent. I am confident they will work for you as well.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at (706)275-3419.



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