

Developing a skills survey for better candidate screening

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This is the sixteenth of a series of Executive Summaries from the author's book The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management (Summary #16, Chapter 5).

Sourcing and Marketing
Assessing and Recruiting
Retention and Training
Transformation

It happens all too often that people are asked (or told) to participate in a job interview – and this usually occurs with only thirty seconds to spare. During those few seconds on the way to the interview room, they are handed a copy of the resume of the interviewee, and given a quick rundown of the highlights of it.

When that happened last, did it occur to you just how little value you felt that you actually brought to the interview? Besides that, do you think that the person being interviewed was able to tell that you were totally unprepared? Do you think that a lack of preparedness made the candidate feel less important?

Upon thinking back to your own last job interviews, were you able to tell when the interviewers were not at all prepared to meet with you? Think about how it made you feel about the interviewers and the company. On the other hand, how did you feel about interviewers that you knew were really prepared?

Finding interviewers that are really prepared and qualified is not easy. Because of it, those who are not prepared bring little value to the interview process, and they stick out like a sore thumb. This can create many awkward moments and problems during the interviews, as well as giving bad impressions of your company, too.



Unprepared interviewers are not able to select top talent.

PREPARING FOR QUALITY INTERVIEWS – AND RESULTS

It only makes sense that the whole purpose of the interview process is to enable your company to get the best talent. You want to weed out non- or low-performers and get the high performing people that are also a good cultural fit for your company. The importance of this is stressed by JACK WELCH, who is a former chairman and CEO of GE. In his book called *Winning*, he said that “Nothing matters more in winning than getting the right people on the field. All the clever strategies and advanced technologies in the world are nowhere near as effective without great people to put them to work.”

Choosing the right people for your company is often done by collecting, assessing, and evaluating all relevant information. While that may seem to be very straightforward – is it really? Is it true that gathering information and analyzing it will enable you to make the right selection of employees? How has it worked so far for your company? Are all of your employees top notch? Although many people believe that “knowledge is power,” the truth is that wisdom is also needed. It is wisdom that enables people to use knowledge correctly.

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Reading a resume can give you some “knowledge” about an individual, and an interview will help you to learn even more and make wise decisions. However, you must also know what to do with that knowledge so that it can provide the real value you need in your decision-making process – that is what this chapter is all about.

THE SKILLS SURVEY – DISCOVERING WHO’S GOT THE SKILLS

When you went to apply for your first job, you probably filled out a job application. At that time, you probably had little idea about what a resume even was – let alone know what is required on one. But even if you did know, you would not have had much good information to put on it at that time – so why bother?

Entry-level employees typically have a lack of applicable information, which is why an application is being used. This form provides the employer with some information upon which to base hiring you – or not.

In other situations, applications are still being used – but often at the other end of the hiring process. They are not, however, being used during the interview process in an above entry-level position. Companies will often provide an application as a final checklist item just prior to bringing a new hire on board. Although the information may be used to help in the background check or benefits processing – applications still are not typically being used until after a hiring decision has already been made.

THE PROBLEM WITH RESUMES

Although they are widely used, a resume has problems just like an application. Both documents really only provide a superficial baseline of information that can hardly be called sufficient when it comes to determining the fitness of a candidate. Think about your own resume, for instance. Does it contain all of your experience? The obvious answer is no – otherwise it would be way too long for practical purposes.

Typical resumes reveal the highlights of an individual’s career. They are also usually generalized in order to show the scope of capabilities and skills. In order to



A resume may not provide you with the complete picture.

provided in the job description. Oftentimes, a candidate cannot rewrite it to show how they are the best qualified, because the job description itself provides too few details to be able to do so.

This creates a real problem. How can a candidate provide the details needed for an outstanding resume when the job description itself is seriously lacking in providing an accurate description of what the job entails or of what outcomes are expected? In spite of this, resumes remain the key criteria for which hiring decisions are made by too many HR and Hiring Managers all the time.

If a candidate does the exact same job in a competitor’s company and is applying for an identical position, you would expect them to have an ideal skills match. Is this what really happens? Most likely, you will probably get about 100 resumes from candidates who end up being “potentially qualified,” and then this number is reduced to about 25. Out of this number, you might find that as few as one to three are an obvious match. This clearly emphasizes why it is necessary to update position descriptions whenever a position becomes open.

It will be rare that you get very many resumes that line up precisely with your needs – even when a thorough job description is given. In some cases it will undoubtedly take some real mental gymnastics to see how the two documents relate at all. This will be true even when they come from a competitor and have the same job.

Remember that resumes are merely data in a raw form. Interviews are still necessary to get a much clearer picture – but you are not ready to make that move just yet.

TIME FOR THE SMART SKILLS SURVEY

Among the other evaluation tools provided in the SMART Search System, which was developed by Patrick Ropella, the Skills Survey should be given to potential job candidates prior to any interview. It will give you even more data from which you can make a more accurate assessment of a candidate’s potential and fit – before you ever meet with your candidates.

The Skills Survey is different from a standard job application in that the Skills Survey is highly customized. You will find it immensely valuable and it does not take a lot of time to develop and use – I promise. If you have already upgraded your position description to include clear objectives and expectations, then it will be easy to create a Skills Survey to give you additional key knowledge about the candidate.

To show you what is involved, let’s go back to our earlier illustration of the registration clerk position at the hospital. In the following reprint, each of the expected outcomes is underlined.

An illustration of a red-bordered clipboard with a white sheet of paper. The paper has the word "EVALUATION" at the top. Below it is a checklist with five items, each with a checkbox. The first item, "Outstanding", has a red checkmark. The other items are "Very Good", "Satisfactory", "Marginal", and "Unsatisfactory".

A skills survey enables companies to choose true top talent.



1. Do you take pride in your healthcare career? Do you care about people? Does solving problems fulfill you? Then you'll fit right in here! We have one of the top customer satisfaction ratings in the country, and we got there by always placing a focus on developing our people and taking care of our customers and staff.
2. We use MEDITECH (healthcare information systems). Our preferred candidate would have some experience (1 to 3 years is ideal), but experience is not required. If you have some other information systems experience, we can train you to use MEDITECH.
3. A minimum of 2 years (5 years is ideal) of previous Emergency Room registration experience is required.
4. We're open 24/7... Want to work some nights or weekends? We need you! Preferred candidates show the flexibility to rotate schedules and share nights and weekends and have a verifiable track record of doing so.
5. We serve a wide variety of customers, so you need to have experience serving all kinds of people. We serve all races, all income levels, and all types of personalities. Preferred candidates enjoy diversity, are relationship builders, and have demonstrated success working in a similar role.
6. Things move fast here – you need to be able to multitask and stay very organized. We track productivity levels and expect a minimum of 10 percent improvement annually. We also encourage and measure innovative ideas, systems improvements, and creative thinking.
7. In an Emergency Room, it can get stressful and emotional as injuries and healings create emotional lows and highs. We have to regulate ourselves to meet the needs of our customers, their families, and our staff. Candidates need to be stable, well adjusted, and capable of handling high pressure moments.

Now, by simply rearranging the statements, these needs can easily be turned into the following Skills Survey form:

**Developing the Skills Survey:
Emergency Room Registration Clerk**

Please type your answers in BLUE and return ASAP to
bonnie.robinson@prestigemedicalcenter.com

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Tell me why you have a career in the healthcare field. Have you received any recognition or awards in your role as it relates to customer service? If yes, describe the recognition and/or awards received.
2. Describe examples of the most significant problems you've solved. How did you identify the problem(s) and then go about solving them?
3. What experience do you have using MEDITECH? How many years have you used the software? Please describe your level of competency and any special training you've received. If you don't have MEDITECH experience, please describe what other information systems experience and/or training you've received.
4. How many years of previous Emergency Room registration experience have you had? With what hospitals? Please outline dates for each position where you worked in an Emergency Room registration role.
5. Have you ever worked nights or weekends? If so, where, and for how long at any one stretch? And/or: Describe your experience with rotational scheduling.
6. Are you available now to work nights or weekends? If so, for how long at any one stretch?
7. Please describe the demographic breakdown of the hospitals where you've worked. Were the customers mostly high-income or low-income? Were the patients predominantly Caucasian, Latino, or African-American?
8. How would you describe your organizational skills? What methods or systems do you use to stay well organized?
9. How have you been recognized for creating better ways of doing things? What's been your most innovative (or creative) idea or your greatest system improvement?
10. How has your performance been tracked with numbers in the past? Have you been recognized for any productivity increases? If so, describe them:
11. While working around an Emergency Room, how do you cope with or regulate stress and emotions? If you were training someone who is new to this type of high pressure environment, what would you suggest to them to help them cope with the stress and emotions that come with this role?
12. Please outline your education and any special training courses you've taken that you feel will benefit you in this role.
13. If asked one of these questions during an interview, how would you answer: Why are you looking to change jobs? What is it that has motivated you to consider this position?
14. This position will be located in Atlanta, GA.
 - a. Are you currently a commutable distance from the site or will you need to relocate?
 - b. If you will need to relocate, do you have any relocation issues or special requirements? If so, please list them.

References

Please provide at least three references. The first priority is past bosses, then employees, then peers, and then customers. Per the example below, please provide relevant details and contact information for your references:

Example: Bob Smith, current Director of Administration at General Hospital, 412-123-4567, Email: bob.smith@generalhospital.com. Bob was the administration manager and my direct boss while I was a registration clerk at General Hospital from 2006 to 2009.

Note: We will not contact any references until after completing the interview process or before notifying you first.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

By now you should be able to see that developing a Skills Survey is not very hard. Our experience reveals that it should be kept to between 10 and 15 questions. It is possible that you may only need 5 strong outcome questions, but you may need up to 20. It depends on how specialized the search is that you want to perform.

Patrick B. Ropella is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group, a 25-year-old international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm in Florida with clients among the world's most prestigious corporations. The Ropella Group focuses on working with mid-level management and executive-level leaders regarding their search, leadership, and/or consulting needs across most roles and functions. Patrick authored the book and web based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*. The SMART Talent Management System covers Sourcing, Marketing, Assessing, Recruiting, Retention, Training and Transforming top talent. Patrick's status as a thought expert, and writer on talent management and leadership has been promoted, featured and published in a wide variety of trade magazines and business publications, and leadership and executive search industry blogs and journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, conferences, trades shows and more. For more information about Growing Your Great Company through Ropella services, visit www.ropella.com, or call Patrick Ropella at +1 850 983 4777.