



Quizzing for the Right Fit

Personality tests become standard for hiring and promoting employees.

By Michael Laff

As with any other type of performance, interviewing for a position requires winning over an audience. But unlike performance attendees, who can walk out of the theater if the show is a flop, it is much more difficult to walk away from a failed hire.

Because the stakes are higher, employing or promoting a candidate creates anxiety for organizations that fear making the wrong selection. According to **Herb Greenberg, CEO of Caliper**, managers are often fooled by the “interview star”—an individual who demonstrates a high motivation to make the interviewer like him.

Caliper has designed a personality test that is used by companies in a variety of fields. The test questions range from inquiries about one’s personality to selecting a single word that best describes the test taker such as “ungoverned” or “unimaginative.”

Initially, test takers might believe they can fudge their way through the exam, but Greenberg insists the questions are designed to tease out even the best actor’s true personality.

Qualitative questions attempt to determine where an individual falls between

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two extremes, such as “a strong leader should always worry about the feelings of others.”

The questions are formulated in such a way that test takers who want to select the socially acceptable answer will eventually drop their guard. Greenberg says that initially, test takers will seek the most admirable trait, but eventually just answer honestly.

“Whether you are trying to fake it or trying to tell the truth, your personality will emerge,” he says.

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Greenberg candidly admits that he, too, was impressed by a recent hire at his own organization whom he later had to dismiss. Some warning signs existed in the employee’s test, such as lack of self-esteem and overly aggressive behavior, but they were not strong enough to be dissuaded from making the hire.

“They were little yellow blinkers, not red flags,” Greenberg says. He emphasizes that the test should be one component among other measurements used to determine whether to hire or promote an individual. To gauge whether a newcomer is a right fit, Greenberg suggests testing the department’s management team as well.

The testing can be used for more than judging the suitability of a potential hire, because it also offers the opportunity to serve as a coaching tool. Management can work with individuals who acknowledge difficulty with time management or being flexible with co-workers.

A staffing agency that has used the test for 15 years believes it to be a reliable indicator of an individual’s fitness for a position when taken into consideration with a thorough interview.

“We decided to hire against the recommendation of the test results twice in the last two years,” says Kim Marzano, director of recruiting for The Advanced Group of Companies. “We were proven wrong each time.”

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Interviews That Get Personal

Each group below contains four statements expressing personal viewpoints. Candidates are asked to select the one statement that reflects the viewpoint most like theirs in each group, then fill in the “most” circle on an answer sheet. From the remaining choices, they select the one statement that least reflects their viewpoint, and fill in the “least” circle on an answer sheet.

- 1 A | Sometimes it’s better to lose than to risk hurting someone.
B | I’m generally good at making “small talk.”
C | Established practices and/or standards should always be followed.
D | I sometimes lose control of my workday.
- 2 A | I rarely have second thoughts about decisions I have made.
B | I’m very careful not to be aggressively demanding of others.
C | I usually stop at yellow lights, rather than race through them.
D | People will often take advantage of you without giving it a second thought.
- 3 A | I think managers worry too much about their people’s feelings and not enough about the bottom line.
B | I work best in situations where I am in control.
C | Even when winning might be at stake, it’s better not to be too forceful.
D | I sometimes worry about things that I can’t control.
- 4 A | I need immediate results.
B | People’s dislike doesn’t really bother me.
C | If I follow my preset objectives, I may not take care of the really important things.
D | If something has worked in the past, it’s better to stick with it.
- 5 A | If threatened, I’ll back off rather than fight.
B | Most people would never intentionally deceive you.
C | Once I give priority to a project, I follow it through.
D | If I can’t do something quickly, I get frustrated.
- 6 A | I don’t let day-to-day difficulties affect me.
B | I look forward to a good party with lots of people.
C | Most people are trustworthy.
D | I will risk untried but promising ways rather than follow safe proven ways.
- 7 A | When I’m with people who I don’t know, making small talk is quite difficult.
B | People who act too slowly are an annoyance to me.
C | I have no regrets about things that I’ve done.
D | Even if something new sounds good, I tend to prefer what’s already established.
- 8 A | I prefer knowing exactly how something should be done before I begin.
B | I sometimes have difficulty getting started after I have been criticized.
C | I’d rather run my own business, and take the chance of failing, than be an executive in a well-established, secure firm.
D | A good manager’s decisions should not be overly influenced by the feelings of others.
- 9 A | I’m willing to be pushy in order to get what I want done.
B | I work best when I can decide what to do and how to do it.
C | Too much empathy can often hinder a negotiation.
D | I base my decisions on facts not ideas.
- 10 A | Time management is not one of my key strengths.
B | I’m always cool, calm and collected.
C | The best part of a party is meeting new people.
D | I never hesitate to take quick action.

Source: Caliper