

PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING: THE SALES MANAGER'S EDGE

As the stakes increase and the price of making a poor personnel decision grows, psychological testing has become a viable method for determining not only which individuals stand a greater chance for overall success but also how to place different people into their appropriate positions.

HIGH-CALIPER PERFORMANCE

Since 1961 one testing company – Caliper Management of Princeton, New Jersey – has assessed over 900,000 business people and more than 4,000 athletes for professional sports franchises. As Caliper CEO and President Herb Greenberg explains, many psychological tests used for help in hiring in the past have proved faulty for one fundamental reason.

"When you're applying for a job," he says, "you're going to try to hide your weaknesses to make yourself seem as perfect as possible. The whole key to this type of testing is to cut through this factor to determine the reality behind the facade that people put forward. And that's one of the reasons that our test works as well as it does."

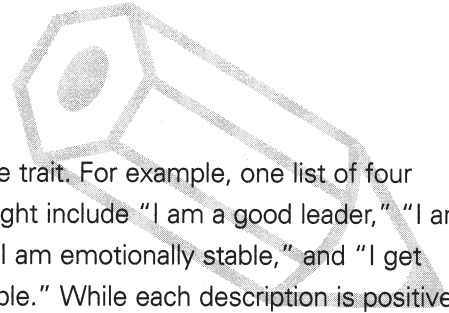
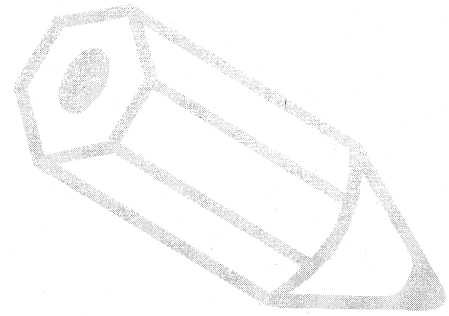
In the Caliper exam, prospective hires respond to 180 questions, each of which is phrased in the form of four self-descriptions. The subject then marks which question best describes him or her. Knowing the subjects want to give the "right" answers, each descrip-

tion is a positive trait. For example, one list of four descriptions might include "I am a good leader," "I am responsible," "I am emotionally stable," and "I get along with people." While each description is positive, by choosing one answer a subject reveals something. After 180 different questions, a subject paints a highly descriptive psychological profile that Caliper's trained professionals can analyze.

But Greenberg is quick to emphasize that no test will tell you automatically which person will succeed in sales.

"The test allows us to assess who this human being is," he says. "Every one of us has strengths, weaknesses and different hot buttons. But before we can tell you how well this person will perform on the job, we have to find out the functional requirements for the job. If it's a sales job, will there be much prospecting? Will they be presenting in front of customers frequently? Do they need a lot of closing ability? Who will they be selling to? What's the product? How much does it cost? And we gather as much information as a customer will give us about the position. Once we have a firm grasp on the nature of the job, then we analyze the person's test results and tell you where we think there's a match.

"But this is one point where many computer tests fail - they don't take into account the nature of the job. Typically the best salesperson could be the worst administrator, and the best administrator could be the



worst salesperson. So unless you know both sides of the equation there's no way in the world you can predict one person's success."

But if you're skeptical whether a simple 180-question test can really predict future success in sales, consider Caliper's results. Factoring out the frequent turnover in many sales organizations by eliminating salespeople who left positions within one year, 85 percent of the individuals Caliper had recommended to clients are today in the top half of their sales forces. In contrast, of those hired against Caliper's recommendation, only 17 percent are in the top half of their sales forces.

SOMETHING WILDER

Not surprisingly, psychological profiles can be used for more than simply screening possible job candidates. One training company, Jack Wilder & Associates (JW&A) of Dallas, has found that psychological testing can multiply sales training exponentially. Using a simple 20-minute test known as the Hartman Value Profile, JW&A can analyze an individual's strengths, weaknesses, limiters and biases. The company then uses the results to help managers better understand how to motivate their salespeople and help them overcome their limitations and enhance their strengths.

The well-known profile consists of two lists of 18 seemingly random statements. Subjects are asked to rank the statements from best to worst. The results are then run through a complex computer program based on the patterns of human thought to formulate an overall subject representation. According to company president Jack Wilder, the Hartman profile puts into managers' hands the exact information they need about their salespeople.

"Managers want to know a few simple things," he says. "They want to know how to communicate effectively, how to talk the way their salespeople listen, how to motivate different individuals and where each person's strengths and weaknesses lie. What this all basically comes down to is how those salespeople

think. Most sales managers I've seen cannot figure all of this out for themselves because they're not psychologists - they're sales managers. Our report is basically an instruction manual for how to work with each individual person."

As with the Caliper test, subjects cannot influence the Hartman profile by providing answers they suspect their examiners want to hear. The 18 items on each list vary from extremely positive ("I love the beauty of the world") to extremely negative ("I curse the day I was born"). The result of 87 years of work in the science of thinking by more than 30 doctors, the Hartman test can produce a full profile based solely on how subjects rank these statements. Wilder claims that the Hartman profile often provides people with a completely new insight on themselves.

"The best thing about the profile, I think," he says, "is that it tells you what you don't naturally pay attention to. It shows you what you don't see on a sales call and it will tell you what you don't hear. Now that is extremely valuable because, trite as it sounds, people don't know what they don't know. And they don't know what they didn't see. But that's what you really need to know. So we take that information and give you a checklist system of what you need to do to pay attention to those things you normally would miss. And our clients find this to be an invaluable service."

Ultimately, sales management is very much a psychological task. Yet few managers have any psychological training under their belts. They operate by the seat of their pants, hitting the bull's-eye with some salespeople but missing the mark entirely with others. For such diverse companies as AT&T, Levi Strauss, IBM, General Electric and thousands more, psychological testing has provided a solid foundation on which to build a highly motivated sales organization, from initial hiring to future success. If that sounds good to you, psychological testing may well be in your sales organization's future too.

CALIPER

The People Who Measure Success