

THE MYTHS AND REALITIES OF EMPLOYEE TESTING

Joan Brannick, PhD, SPHR

Many companies avoid testing applicants or employees because they perceive it as too costly. Many employers also fear legal action by people who take the test. The cost of testing is minimal compared to the tremendous costs of employee turnover. The cost of testing can also be relatively low compared to the expenses associated with employment-related lawsuits.

Conservative estimates of costs associated with turnover range from 1/3-1/2 of the annual salary of the employee that you are replacing. The cost of replacing management, executive and highly skilled talent can easily be 1-2 times the annual salary of the person you need to replace. Testing can, therefore, be a valuable investment for organizations to make in hiring and retaining top talent.

There are many myths surrounding employee testing. Let's look at some of those myths and the corresponding realities.

MYTHS AND REALITIES OF TESTING

Myth 1: One test fits all employees and situations.

Reality 1: Different tests are meant for different purposes.

A good test is designed and used with a specific purpose in mind. The clearer a company is about WHAT they want to test for and WHY they want to test, the more effective their testing is likely to be. Companies need to then use this information to identify and select the test or tests that best meet their needs.

Myth 2: Using tests increase your company's exposure to lawsuits.

Reality 2: Tests developed well and used effectively are likely to decrease your company's exposure to lawsuits.

In assessing liability, one of the things that the courts typically look at is how consistently a company treats employees and applicants when making employment-related decisions. Generally, employees or applicants taking a test that uses the same number of items worded the same way on each and every test are treated more consistently than they are in the average interview, no matter how well trained the interviewer is or how well scripted the interview is. Of course, this situation assumes that you are using a valid test. A valid test is one in which there is evidence to show that decisions made based on test results are accurate ones.

Myth 3: Tests should be used solely for hiring/promotion purposes.

Reality 3: Tests are great for a variety of purposes.

Most people think of using testing when making hiring or promotion decisions. While testing is appropriate in these situations, it is also appropriate in developmental situations. Testing, if done effectively, can help employees (and their bosses) better understand employees' strengths, developmental areas, and preferences/ motivations as they relate to a particular job (or jobs).

Myth 4: Tests are 100% accurate.

Reality 4: NOTHING is 100% accurate.

Good tests are reliable and accurate. They are not, however, 100% accurate. Nothing (including interviews, tests, performance ratings, work samples, etc.) is 100% accurate. Tests can be extremely accurate if chosen well and used effectively.

Myth 5: People should rely more on test results than they rely on their own judgment when making decisions about an employee.

Reality 5: People should rely on data from several sources when making decisions about an employee.

Tests should never be the sole source on which make employment-related decisions. In making decisions about employees, you've got many sources of data available to you including past work experience, past/current job performance, interview data, and test data. You get a much more complete and accurate picture of a person using all of that data than you will if you used only test data.

MORE ON TESTING

The following websites provide more information on employee tests and good testing practices:

1. Association of Test Publishers (www.testpublishers.org)

The Association of Test Publishers is a non-profit organization representing publishers and providers of tests and assessment tools and/or services related to assessment, selection, certification, and educational and clinical issues. This site has a useful section on testing called, Frequently Asked Questions.

2. O*NET (www.onetcenter.org/guides.html)

The Occupational Information Network (O*NET), is a comprehensive database of worker attributes and job characteristics. As the replacement for the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), O*NET is the nation's primary source of occupational information. Check out this site for, "Testing and Assessment, an Employer's Guide to Good Practices." This guide helps managers and others understand and use employment testing and assessment practices.

3. Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (www.siop.org/workplace)

This is the website for national organization of industrial and organizational psychologists. This portion of the site includes information about employee testing including what to look for in choosing a high quality test and how to implement an employee testing program. Testing, when used effectively, is a very powerful tool that helps you identify employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics as they relate to specific jobs. Use the information in this article to help you make the most of this tool in your organization.

Testing, when used effectively, is a very powerful tool that helps you identify employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics as they relate to specific jobs. Use the information in this article to help you use tests to make better decisions about selecting and developing employees in your organization.

About the Author

Joan Brannick, PhD, SPHR is President of Brannick HR Connections (BHRC). She is an organizational psychologist that consults, writes, and speaks on recruiting, hiring, engagement, and leadership trends and best practices. She is the co-author of Finding and Keeping Great Employees, a Fortune Magazine "Best Business Book." Her insights have appeared in many business and HR publications including Fortune Magazine, HR Magazine, and the Wall Street Journal. For more information about BHRC's services, call (813) 672-0500 or visit www.BrannickHRConnections.com.