

## **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING**

*“People get hired for what they can do and fired for who they are.”*

Employment turnover cost the U.S. economy a trillion dollars last year. What is it costing your company? The estimated costs of a poor hire run from three to seven times a person’s salary. With stiff competition, costs rising, and margins shrinking, no company can afford \$300,000 in poor-hire losses. When I say costs of a mishire, I don’t mean just the wrong hire’s salary. I am talking about the management and training hours eaten up, the dissatisfied customers, the compromised processes, and employee morale issues – it all adds up.

Have you ever hired someone who wowed you in the interview, had a great resume, said all the right things, even got good references – all in all you had a great feeling about this person – only to find out after she started the job that she made excuses for not achieving objectives; she had poor follow-up skills, compromised your company’s values, and was either unaware of how to, or simply unwilling to, turn her performance around?

On the other hand, have you ever hired people who are just gems? No batteries or in-depth training required, they come in and hit the ground running just because of who they are, what they value, and how well they use their strengths. These people take virtually no ramp-up time, everyone loves to work with them, and you count your blessings every day they come to work because you feel really lucky to have them. Every one of us wants someone like the latter; they are often self-starters, are quick thinkers, and believe in being proactive. Given these two very different scenarios, the question becomes *“So how do I get more of the great matches, steer clear of the not-so-great ones, and improve my hiring batting average?”*

When you are aware of the costs associated with bad hires and choose to turn that around, you are one step ahead of the game. Then, by choosing a solid system, obtaining thorough training, and again being committed to changing how you hire – along with a good old dose of patience and discipline – your company will soon be geared up to eliminate the rest and hire only the best.

Putting a systematic hiring process in place, using it consistently, holding people accountable for the activities and objectives of the system, and identifying the core values that the position and company require is the only way I have seen, read about, or experienced to obtain more employees of the second type. With only four full-time people, my company has often knocked results out of the park, and when I look at the competitors in my industry, many of them need three to four more staff members than Alliance to produce what we produce in margin. This is due to my ability to say no to the wrong people, terminating early when I get duped, and my unwillingness to compromise my company’s core values and processes.

Knowing the core behaviors and values of the person you hire allows you to look into the future and know who the employee will be on the job after the initial six-month “honeymoon” is over. This shortens ramp-up time, increases productivity, reduces turnover, and decreases costs. When creating a behavioral interviewing process, first and foremost hold your company values and operating standards in the highest regard, and ask yourself and the management team, *“What are the non-negotiable operating standards that must be met for us to maintain our reputation (for whatever you are known for, as it is different for every firm), be profitable, and continue to deliver high-quality service to our customers?”*

After that, very methodically and systematically verbalize and define the smart objectives, or Key Performance Indicators, required to achieve in the role. Then, drill down and ask yourself and the management team, *“What are the day-to-day big-picture activities or core functions that this person will have to fully engage in to effectively achieve these objectives in the time frames we expect?”* Once you have this knowledge and are crystal clear about what you expect from this person, then it is time to determine who they need to be, what they need to have done in the past, and what mandatory walk-in skills and talents they need to have.

The part of the search-planning process that I find most rewarding and fun – heck, I even charge my clients for this service – is the drill-down process. This creative and strategic type of thinking has the hiring managers and the recruiter really discuss and debate who a person really needs to be to naturally perform at the level of competence the company requires.

In the system that Alliance uses, and Keen Hire developed, we use a model that encompasses the four main categories of behavior; and it delves into the candidates’ approaches to thinking and solving problems, modes of acting, styles of interacting, and core motivations – all very important things when you consider how a person will go about doing his or her job. Consider whether you have someone who is very money-motivated but does not have much commitment to service, does not build solid relationships, and does not really believe in your core values or value proposition – uh-oh, be concerned about customer retention. What if you hire someone with lots of passion but no organizational skills, or poor planning and delegating skills? This person can mess up a two-car funeral.

How about if you hire someone who is all about the quality, but has no discernment and is not proactive in day-to-day activities? This person will certainly spend many hours a day making sure things are right, but won’t initiate any training to prevent the wrong things from happening again. Often these types of people feel victimized on the job and work long hours – not because they have to, but because they don’t see any other way. I could go on and on; I have seen almost every goofy scenario and often experienced it. I wonder how some of these people make it in business, and then I understand that most of their bosses probably have the same issues, which is why American companies are in such deep doo-doo and the American workforce is predicted by so many to be headed for trouble.

There are people everywhere who can and will do it better, cheaper, and faster, and given the opportunity, they will. My 22-year staffing veteran’s philosophy is that we are the people supplying corporate America with their people, and we need to not tolerate this craziness and ineffectiveness in the hiring process within our own firms. We need to ante up our inside hiring practices so that we can deliver the same level of service on the outside. Frankly, our people need to be better than these mish-mashes of bad habits all rolled up into one person. Our people must be exemplary models of what we say we do, otherwise there is no integrity in what we say we do.

Getting back to selecting better people: The next step is to facilitate a conversation between the key decision-makers for this role about what the critical behaviors are that lead to success. Many times, taking a good look at the best performers, literally watching them operate on the job or having them behaviorally interviewed in depth, will pull forth a magnitude of critical information about what right looks like. The biggest challenge I find is that as soon as someone gets a glimpse of the power of this industrial-psychology model, they want someone who has every great trait under the sun. Then I have to remind them that there is no job that someone that powerful would apply for – they either already have their own company or they are a self-development guru like Jack Canfield or Stephen Covey. I then have to coach them to pick only the most important traits.



In the behavioral interviewing and industrial psychology industry, I have been told, the average selection is between six and nine traits per role, and when the role is the utmost senior level, maybe 11 traits, at the maximum. To narrow the gap of wanting everything, often further education or coaching makes all the difference. A thorough understanding of each trait, and what complements and leads to other traits, can help narrow the list. For example: if someone is naturally proactive and has a desire to be the best in the workplace, this person will often develop a love of learning, and mastery will be a natural form of self-expression. Or if a person is proactive, loves to serve people, and enjoys seeing people progress, he or she will often grow to become a great developer of people.

Once you get flat on the six to nine or so traits that you are choosing, with at least one trait coming from each of the four main categories of behavior (thinking, acting, interacting, and motivations), you are ready to decide which questions and answers best home in on your company and position-specification needs. The whole process of isolating the right traits, debating about it (I highly recommend that, as I find that the best critical thinking is done in a group of three to five committed people with similar values, yet unique points of view), and developing a behavioral questionnaire takes about three hours when you do the first one, and much less time after you get good at it.

The good news is that a solid behavioral-interviewing system not only has behavioral traits but also has solid questions and real-time answers with coaching tools to aid you in determining whether your candidates' answers are an appropriate indication of their truly possessing that trait.

At Alliance HR Network, we do behavioral interviewing for the following reason: Behaviors, more than experience, will predict success. Experience is only one dimension of a person's profile, and every company has a different infrastructure and a different set of operating practices and core values; one size certainly does not fit all. In all actuality, experience is very often the least predictive of a candidate's fit or success in the role or the company.

Another reason that we conduct behavioral interviewing is to capitalize on management's time; most companies spend 80% of their time trying to fix the bottom 20% of performers. This happens because companies are always behind the eight ball with hiring, managers are desperate to fill their open positions, and quality suffers – and in the long run, so does the manager. It is much easier, rewarding, and lucrative to practice behavior selection than behavior modification.

Additionally, the purpose of any staffing process is to identify and choose those individuals who can deliver the behaviors needed to successfully perform in a given role, and we need to evaluate and select the whole person. Furthermore, we would rather hire slowly and fire quickly because hastily made hiring and promotion decisions usually lead to big problems later, and predominantly, these problems could have been avoided had a deliberate, thorough process been followed up front.

Yes, it seems like a lot of preplanning time and preliminary work, and it is. The advantage is, as a professional in the staffing and placement industry, understanding and possessing the ability to integrate behavioral interviewing with your recruitment process will not only leverage your personal service-delivery power, but it will also increase your market share, boost your operating margin, and decrease your headaches and misery. Even better news, when you get really good at selecting your talent through a model like this, you can even recoup your training expenses and charge your client's companies for this level of consulting service. Isn't your future gain worth the investment?



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Margaret Graziano is the founder of KeenHire and inventor of Conscious Hiring, a system for choosing top performers, specifically Management, Service & Sales people wisely. Companies who deploy conscious hiring say, "this quality of hire system helps increase our return on our people and recruiting spend". Results show up in real time with increases in revenue and improvements in customer retention and less new hire ramp up time. Conscious Hiring sets both the hiring manager and the new employee up to win. Email Margo at [keenmargo@yahoo.com](mailto:keenmargo@yahoo.com) for more information on behavioral interviewing and hiring to retain.