Tip #1: Develop Screening Policies for Employees

It is imperative that organizations define a process that all recruiters will use for creating and using screening questionnaires. It’s important so that there are no legal issues or general inconsistencies. A discussion of what constitutes an illegal question should be explored and clarified as a group.

In addition, the use of “standard” questions should be determined. Are there certain questions that everyone should be adding to their questionnaire? If so, what are they?

Finally, everyone should agree on a general scoring policy. Depending on the tool, you may have the ability to set a minimum acceptable score for a screening questionnaire. Again, so that the company is consistent in its’ practices, a discussion and a consensus on this issue must be brought to the table.

Keep it short. Ask your key questions to quickly screen people in/out. Ask some of the questions you’d ask in a phone interview.

Build a library of questionnaires early and force employees to use them. This provides control over what candidates are being asked, what type of employees are being hired, and whether the questions being asked are legal, etc.

Tip #2: Including Questions ONLY – No Answers

Ideally, the exact answers to the questions that you use should not be found in the job ad. If they are, it will be too easy for a job applicant to “beat” the screening questionnaire.

For example, let’s imagine that your job posting clearly states that you are looking for someone with 5+ years of experience. You create a screening questionnaire stating, “How many years of experience do you have as a sales engineer?” The options are 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5+ years.

There is a high probability that most applicants, regardless of their true experience, will answer the 5+ years since the information is found in the job ad. If you do wish to ask this type of question, ensure that the job ad does not contain the exact answer.

Tip #3: Make All Questions Job-Related

It is pivotal that the questions asked have a direct and clear relationship to the qualifications and skills needed to perform the job effectively. This is particularly important if you are assigning an acceptable minimum score and then screening applicants based on their answers.

As you write the screening questionnaire, ask yourself, “If an applicant wanted to challenge this question, would I be able to show a direct relationship between the content of the question and the actual skills and qualifications needed for the job?” If the answer is no, the question should not be included.
**Tip #4: Focus on Tangible Skills and Experience**

Always focus screening questions on tangible skills and experience. Instead of asking if a candidate is an expert with Sales Logix, ask if they know how to run reports with Sales Logix. Instead of asking a candidate if he has “managed a team,” ask if that candidate has been directly “responsible for the hiring and training of employees.”

**Tip #5: Include Legal Questions ONLY**

Always ensure that the questions you require candidates to answer are legal. Questions that you want to ask out of curiosity and are not job-related pose a substantial legal risk.

If you are not familiar with the guidelines of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), now would be a good time to brush up on them. For example, asking “Will you be requiring a handicapped parking space?” or “Are you considered to be part of a minority group?” is highly illegal. However, under EEOC, if you add an option to decline to answer these questions, then they become legal questions. Without having this knowledge however, you could put yourself and your organization in a precarious position.

Again, if applicants could potentially ask themselves why a question is being asked, rethink the necessity, and possibly, legality, of that question.

**Tip #6: Be Consistent**

Be as consistent as you can. You should not be changing your screening questionnaire after the job has been posted. If you do, you’ll be negatively affecting your ability to screen applicants properly.

**Tip #7: Incorporate Non-Measurable Questions**

You have the option to create open-ended questions. Monster refers to them as “text” questions. These can be used to ask questions about a candidate’s qualities or attributes. For example, you might want to ask a candidate a question like, “In one sentence, explain why you have been successful in sales.”

A common misconception about this type of question is that because it can’t be automatically scored, it’s futile to create one. That’s not true. Open-text questions may give you some very valuable information, such as:

- A more succinct explanation of why candidate would be a good fit for the position
- Highlighting their difficulty in expressing their thoughts and/or spelling, which are extremely important in many positions. The resume may not reveal this because it has been spellchecked, and possibly reviewed by a third party.

You may benefit greatly from incorporating one or two of these types of questions.
Tip #1: Develop Screening Policies for Employees

It’s important to keep the number of questions manageable so don’t ask for the same information in two different questions. For example, if you selected the work authorization filter when you created your job ad, then don’t create a yes/no question regarding their authorization to work in the United States.

Tip #2: Including Questions ONLY – No Answers

It is quite common to have recruiters arbitrarily decide that a score of, for example, 75% is the minimum acceptable score for all questionnaires. The problem with doing this is that it does not assess the number of questions that are being asked, which questions are “must-haves” versus “nice-to-haves,” and more importantly, what you are truly looking for in a candidate.

In fact, many recruiters believe that the top candidates are frequently those who score around the 60% to 85% range. As a group, these candidates appear to have a firmer grasp of their true skills and qualifications and generally respond in a more truthful manner.

If absolutely every question on your questionnaire is a “must-have” and you believe that you have written your questions in an irrefutable manner, feel free to assign a minimum score of 100%. If you have four questions of an equal score and are willing to compromise on some of them, feel free to assign a score of 50%.

Whatever the situation, make sure that you can intelligently articulate to a colleague the reasons why you arrived at that score. If you can’t, there is probably something wrong with your score, which in turn will skew your results.

Tip #3: Make All Questions Job-Related

Writing screening questionnaires that accurately measure the important skills, qualifications, and/or personality traits of a candidate is not an easy thing to accomplish. In addition, being able to interpret the answers to these questions is a challenging task. As you become comfortable writing and assessing screening questionnaires, be aware of the lessons you learn and incorporate them in your future questionnaires.

The questionnaires in your library can be seen as a work in progress. The first time you create a questionnaire, you may realize that it may be too strict or too lenient. Remember, by creating and saving questions to your library, the template questionnaire can be modified, so that the next time you post the job you’ll have a better questionnaire.