

By Amy Bingham

# AVOIDING HIRING PITFALLS:

ONE STEP YOU SHOULDN'T SKIP

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**Y**ou're doing your routine quality control checks. You call one of your best clients after placing an inbound customer service representative, and you ask how she's doing, one week into her assignment. He hesitates. "She's doing okay," he says with some trepidation. Not satisfied he's coming clean with you, you probe a little more. Finally, he tells you he has observed that she's "a bit abrupt" with the customers when she's under pressure. In fact, just this morning a customer asked to speak with him when your employee did not resolve an issue to his satisfaction. He

what's causing this behavior, and you'll help to resolve it. You hang up the phone with the nagging feeling that regardless of what you do, a request for a replacement is coming. And while our best clients tolerate missteps if we correct them quickly, you know you're really only as good as your last placement, and that competitors are calling on your client every day. This situation could cost you the account.

You know that, above all, a customer service rep has to be able to remain calm and pleasant under pressure, because, as the old saying goes,

**Behavioral interviewing is grounded in the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior on the job. It is designed to take the subjectivity out of the hiring process and help us make a decision to hire based on facts.**

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puts you on notice that while he's giving her the benefit of the doubt at this point, he's not sure she'll work out.

You are astounded. This candidate was referred to you through one of your best temps. She had over five years' experience in an inbound call center. She tested well, she told you exactly what you wanted to hear when you interviewed her and her references were good. She was excited about the prospect of working with this employer of choice.

You apologize and promise your client you'll have a talk with the employee immediately to find out

the customer is always right. This is a basic requirement for the position. So what went wrong here? As you reflect on it to determine how you could have uncovered this behavioral issue *before* you hired this employee, you remember that it was really busy the day you interviewed her. One of your peers had called in sick. You were doing the jobs of two people the day she came in, and you were rushed. You conclude it's possible you cut some corners and didn't interview her as thoroughly as you would have liked to. You pull up her file, and you notice you skipped the behav-



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ioral interview you typically conduct with all applicants. You wonder if your decision to hire this individual would have been different if you had asked her a question such as: *Tell me about a time when a customer pushed you to the point of frustration. Specifically describe the situation, the actions you took and the result you achieved.*

The standard interview is fraught with problems. For starters, most job applicants are on their very best behavior when interviewing. They are focused on selling themselves, and because we have clients to please and

legal ramifications of saying the wrong thing. Very often, we get transferred to human resources and the only information we're able to validate is dates of employment, positions held and occasionally, eligibility for rehire.

It's for these reasons that behavioral interviewing has become a technique commonly employed by many organizations as a standard part of the applicant screening process. Behavioral interviewing is grounded in the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior on the job. It is designed to take the

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positions to fill, we're inclined to accept what they tell us willingly. Second, it's human nature to ignore any red flags when we're excited about a candidate we're considering for hire, and we often do just that. We ignore the little voice inside telling us something isn't quite right. Third, references are not foolproof, because applicants typically only provide us with contact information for individuals they are confident will tell us good things about them. Additionally, most companies train their managers not to provide references at all to avoid the potential

subjectivity out of the hiring process and help us make a decision to hire based on facts, thus reducing the likelihood of surprises post-hire like the one outlined above. Questions that start with "Tell me about a time when ..." or "Give me an example of ..." worded using the SAR technique (Situation, Action, Response) force the applicant to recall real-life experiences that he or she must then be able to clearly articulate, thus demonstrating a skill is present. If the candidate cannot come up with a *specific situation*, the interviewer can assume the individual does not have suffi-

cient experience in the skill being assessed. It's a process that's proven successful in helping companies make good hires. *The problem is that all too often we skip the behavioral interview because we're too busy to take the time to ask these questions.*

If behavioral interviewing is part of your screening process, you already have the safeguards in place to avoid being blindsided, like the recruiter above. Your goal should be to institutionalize this important step in your

screening process, because it's as essential as skill-based testing in evaluating job fit. If your company does not use behavioral interviewing, you can acquire information through various resources by Googling "behavioral interviewing" via the Internet, or by engaging a consultant experienced in the technique. Any investment you make will very likely pay for itself quickly in both reduced turnover costs and increased customer retention – *because you'll make better placements!*

Our business is fiercely competitive, and client loyalty is difficult to acquire. Cutting corners during the screening process, and crossing your fingers that your placement will stick, is a recipe for failure. Our clients don't expect to have to warn us that the temporary employee they engaged us to secure for them may not work out. They expect to be satisfied, because hiring is our business. **SI**

**Amy Bingham** is a staffing industry veteran and owner of Bingham Consulting Professionals, a firm dedicated to helping staffing companies grow. The Web site is [www.binghamcp.com](http://www.binghamcp.com).



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