

## Assessment Tools – Friend or Foe?

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Have you noticed that assessment tools are gaining popularity lately? With the intervention of technology it is now easier than ever to take an assessment. Simply answer the questions online and, within minutes, the software will compile your answers and provide you with a report that can range anywhere from one page to five, or even ten pages in length.. It is great to have so much information readily available.

For decades assessments have been an excellent tool for Training and Human Resources professionals. As with everything else, some assessment tools are more effective than others. But a well-written, validated assessment can help employees to understand their personality style, the reasons for their own and other's behaviors, their preferences, their strengths, and even their areas for development. When used for discovery, understanding, and training purposes, assessments are very valuable.

But, it also seems that people are using assessments for other purposes. Lately, folks are talking about using assessments to determine if the right person is in the right job, which employees should stay and which ones should go during a downsizing, or if someone will be successful in a particular role. In one situation, an organization was seeking an assessment that would predict which front line employees will make good supervisors. While assessments can definitely offer value in determining where a person's natural strengths lie and where he/she needs coaching and development, they do not function well as "predictors of success" when considering individuals for promotion or placement. This is because people are able to learn and develop skill in areas where they may score low initially on an assessment.

Here are some Do's and Don'ts for using Assessment Tools:

#### **DO**

- Explain to employees the purpose of the assessment and how the information will be used. Some people are reluctant to take assessments for fear that the results will be used against them.
- Use assessments to identify strengths and training needs, and have a plan in place for how the employee can continue to use strengths and work on developing deficiencies as indicated by the assessment.
- Spend time with employees, either in a group or individually, debriefing them on the results so that they understand what the assessment results mean and how they can use that information to their advantage.
- Use phrases like "your responses to the questions on the assessment indicate that you..." This will help people to feel comfortable that they own the feedback in a self-assessment and that you are not telling them who they are or how they think.
- When discussing developmental feedback received from peers, direct reports, or others, be clear that this is the individual's "perception" of the situation. Suggest that the individual being assessed discuss any unclear feedback with the person who provided it. You should coach him/her on how to approach the discussion with others regarding the feedback they've provided.
- Consult with your human resources department before using assessments as part of a hiring or promotional screening process. There may be regulatory requirements in your state for using assessments in this way.

- Be sure to consider other factors such as interview results, past performance record, etc. when using assessments as a tool to make promotion or hiring decisions. The assessment should be only part of the data used to make your decision.
- Remember that some assessments measure preferences, which are different from behaviors and abilities. People can learn to do things in a way that differs from their preferences.

## **Don't**

- Use assessment tools to put people in “boxes” or categories.
- Make an assessment tool your sole resource for promotion or hiring decisions.
- Give employees assessments and results without some sort of “debrief” to help them understand the report and determine how best to use the information from the assessment.
- Make value judgments (good or bad) about employees based solely on assessment results.
- Give results to a third party (someone other than the person being assessed).
- Lose sight of the fact that assessments are designed to measure a particular thing (skill in a given area, preferences, natural communication style under a set of circumstances such as stress or conflict, etc.). Don't assume that because you have seen the results of an assessment that you know all about the person being assessed. Each individual is complex so remember you are only seeing part of a bigger picture.
- Use an employee's assessment results in a way that you would not want someone to use your assessment results.

When used properly, assessment tools can help training and hr personnel to correct deficiencies, solve problems, and set employees up for success. You may want to keep this do's and don'ts list handy when considering the use of employee assessments.