

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT PEOPLE-PEOPLE? A CALL CENTER CASE STUDY

A call center experiencing significant performance fluctuations among its staff engaged our services to assess a group of inbound call center employees with The McQuaig Word Survey®. We looked at the key differences between high and low performers.

Prior to conducting the study we interviewed the hiring team, which consisted of customer service managers and recruiters, and asked about the key attributes they looked for in call center candidates when hiring. They told us that they wanted people-people: friendly, enthusiastic communicators with the ability to delight customers.

After we conducted the study we met with the hiring team to discuss the results. We started by explaining our four trait scales: Dominant, Sociable, Relaxed and Compliant. Then we announced that the only trait scale where there was a significant difference between high and low performers was the Sociable Scale (we define Sociability as demonstrating a friendly, outgoing, empathetic, people oriented nature). The hiring team nodded in agreement.

Then we announced that, in fact, it was a low score on the Sociable scale that was linked to high performance on the job! The hiring managers were shocked. However, upon review of the results, they realized that the highly sociable employees had a lower call volume than their low sociable colleagues and seemed to have difficulty sitting in a cubicle all day with little peer interaction. On the other hand, the less sociable employees showed an ability to process calls efficiently, stick to the script provided and, while polite and helpful, didn't feel the need to socialize with the customer.

Now, I am not implying that you shouldn't hire sociable people for your call center. However, the example cited above identifies a common mistake made by hiring managers. They draw general assumptions about traits required to succeed in a job and hire based on those assumptions, without carefully validating that these traits are indeed linked to performance.

Having performance related data is one thing. The challenge lies in translating that data into meaningful information that can be used in the hiring process. When this is not done properly, we can, with the best intentions, fill up our organizations with all the wrong people!

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