Case Study

By Janet Rorholm

Following your gut can get you into trouble.

That’s the lesson Mark Shelton, co-owner of Strategic Print Solutions of Hiawatha, a managed print services company, learned recently when it comes to hiring.

Tired of the hire-train-turnover cycle, Shelton wanted change.

“It’s expensive, it really is,” he said of the constant turnover.

“I knew that if we wanted to morph our organization to one headed for greatness, we needed to bring more science into the art of the hiring process,” Shelton said.

That’s when he called business consultant Rena Striegel with Empowered Business Strategies of Cedar Rapids, who suggested personality testing to determine whether a candidate is the right fit for the position and the company’s culture.

“They had a real need for a specific level of salesperson in an industry where there is a lot of turnover,” Striegel said. “I challenged them to find sales people who would fit into the culture of their organization. You can hire the greatest sales person, but if they don’t fit into the company, you’ll find they won’t stay.”

First, Striegel tested Strategic Print Solutions’ management team using the Winslow Assessment. The personality test — created by the Winslow Research Institute (www.winslowresearch.com) — tests 24 traits, such as coachability, self-confidence and assertiveness. Next, Striegel developed profiles of other positions, including salesperson, by having all 21 of its employees take the test.

While the company’s management team easily agreed to take the test, it took some persuading for other employees.

“We told them it would help us understand how they are wired and how they could best grow and prosper in their career paths and it would help us make sure we have them in the right position,” Shelton said.

Turns out some people weren’t in positions that best suited them and some adjustments were made, he said.

“We feel we have the right people in the right seats and the bus is heading in the right direction,” Shelton said.

The result?

“Our turnover is way down,” Shelton said.

But trusting the science wasn’t as easy as Shelton thought. After spending time and effort to test and develop a personality profile of the salesperson position, he was tempted to hire someone after a good interview without having the person take the test.

Striegel urged him to wait and make sure that what they saw is what they would get. Turns out
the person Shelton wanted to hire didn’t score well and didn’t take rejection well, which didn’t fit what they were looking for at all.

“It was a great exercise on hiring on the likability factor,” Striegel said. “People want to hire people who they like, but people who sell are pretty good at selling themselves. They come across as likable and so you assume they can do the job.”

Shelton said he’s a believer now.

“The profile was a lot more insightful than the interview process,” he said. “We’ve avoided a number of hiring decisions that would have been costly and could have been disastrous.”

Striegel said the likability factor still plays a role in the hiring process, but it shouldn’t be the main consideration.

“You still get to hire who you like, but you want to make sure that the people you do hire can do the job so you can continuing liking them for a really long time,” she said.

Striegel offering the following tips when hiring:

• Be clear about what the position is. Strategic Print Solutions, for example, wanted a self motivator who would sell solutions rather than products.
• Look for a person with the skills and personality who will work in the most effective manner. This is where personality profiling can help.

Striegel said that people try to influence the computerized test, but the test detects inconsistent answers and will invalidate the results and require the candidate to take the test again. About a third of people who take the test answer inaccurately, she said.

Striegel said the profiling she did for Strategic Print Solutions benefitted job candidates because she sat down with candidates and went over the personality profiles of the management team so the candidate would know who they would be working for.

“It allows you not to guess what kind of an organization you are walking into so candidates can make good decisions, too,” Striegel said.

Shelton said the cost was worth it because it saves him money in the long run.

“Who are we hiring, and what do we really want?” Shelton asked.

“We’ve avoided a lot of people over the years,” Striegel added.

“A lot of people are not making the decisions they need to make,” she said.

“Then we go back and say, ‘Okay, well, now that we’ve learned that we’re not hiring people like this, how can we do better? How do we avoid making mistakes like this?’”

Shelton agreed.

“I’ve had eight or nine different CEOs at Strategic Print Solutions in the last 20 years,” he said. “It’s been a very powerful tool.”

“People who are at their jobs for a long time are people who are likable,” Shelton said.

“Likability is a factor,” Striegel said.

Striegel still finds herself conducting personality tests on many of her clients.

“People are just so surprised by it,” she said. “They really like the clarity of it. It’s immediate, it’s feedback, and it’s an immediate response to what they’ve done.”

Striegel and Shelton both agree that hiring takes a lot of time and money. However, using personality testing can save companies millions of dollars and prevent them from hiring the wrong person.

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