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Accident Prone:

The case for Pre-Employment Testing of Safety Sensitive Employees

Screening employees to find their reaction to tough situations can build the foundation of a company's safety culture.

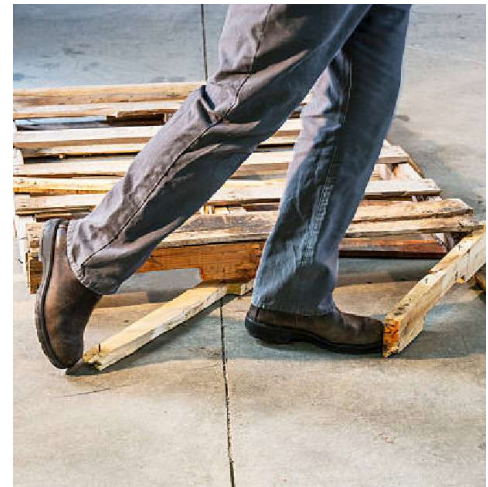
Accident Prone. The very term might bring to mind the image of a relative, one with an ever-present injury from their latest misfortune. Or perhaps one thinks of a friend, whose latest story involves a weekend barbecue that went very wrong. That would after all, at least explain the elaborate bandages by the storyteller. With friends and relatives, it is human nature to be dismissive and not label loved ones as being, well, accident prone. Instead, as a society, we prefer use other, more friendly terms. Describing someone rather as "a little bit clumsy," sounds much more agreeable than calling them accident prone.

But what if a clumsy individual- or an accident prone one- was applying for a job with a prospective employer in the aviation field, such as an FBO? How could an employer possibly know that the well-dressed, articulate candidate sitting right in front of them is accident prone? As "clumsy" is not often a skill listed on a resume, the answer is most employers have no idea what inherent safety behaviors a candidate will bring to the workplace. Instead, it is not until weeks after a candidate is hired does he or she begin to reveal behaviors that may not be conducive to a safety sensitive environment, such as an airport ramp. Worse, sometimes those traits are not revealed until a catastrophic accident occurs.

That dilemma is about to change notes Mike France, managing director, safety & training, National Air Transportation Association (NATA). "Rather than relying on a hiring manager's gut instinct about a potential employee, NATA will

soon be bringing to market an affordable, pre-employment screening tool for FBOs and other aviation businesses to give a better sense of a candidate's personal safety culture."

First introduced at NATA's first annual Ground Handling Safety Symposium in September of 2017, the pre-employment assessment is already in beta test with an undisclosed NATA member FBO, notes France. The assessment is administered online to a prospective candidate in under an hour, and the areas of testing include Quality Focus, Leadership Potential, Positive Attitude, Process Monitoring, Applied Learning, Quantitative Problem Solving, Responsibility, Safety Orientation, Teamwork, Work Ethic, Work Tempo, Mechanical Reasoning, and Continuous Improvement- all areas of similar importance to FBOs and other aviation businesses.



How exactly might these areas of concentration relate to aviation? At an FBO for example, imagine trying to determine if a potential candidate is one who can handle the stress of operating a fuel truck on a busy ramp, while quickly and safely handling multiple fuel orders under constant time constraints. Such a scenario is one in which gut instinct can fail a hiring manager- especially when the candidate in question has no previous FBO experience. But, because the pre-employment assessment measures factors such as work tempo, quality focus and quantitative problem solving, the output of the test will specifically highlight those areas of concern about the candidate, and call them to the attention of the hiring manager.

In addition to the quantitative results found on NATA's soon-to-be released pre-employment assessment, statements such as "This individual's scores suggest that he/she is

likely to: Have difficulty performing work tasks at a fast pace; this individual's natural tendency is to work slowly and at a much slower pace than his/her peers; Have difficulty concentrating and performing effectively when faced with multiple

tasks at the same time; Find mathematical computations challenging and may make errors when asked to do so" provide greater detail where a candidate's scoring was below the statistical mean for the areas being tested. Though the aforementioned findings doesn't exactly state "We don't recommend this candidate is put in the Jet fuel truck on a busy day," it's easy to see an individual who scores lower than his or her peers in such areas- work tempo, quality focus and quantitative problem solving- may mean a different role is better suited for that candidate, or the candidate may not be the best fit for the employer. In addition to the quantitative scores in each measurement area, sample interview questions are also provided specifically based on an individual's scores.

Developed by Select International, a company specializing in employee screening tools- the pre-employment assessment has been used by leading manufacturing firms and other industrial concerns for years and the results are impressive. Aggregated results from the manufacturing sector, which uses the same test NATA will soon offer, have found statistically significant improvement by the companies that use this test as part of their overall hiring plan. Specifically, the results have shown employers who use this assessment have experienced a 10-50 percent decrease in workers' compensation claims, a 5 to 30 percent decrease in turnover, a 5-10 percent increase in productivity, a 10-15 percent increase in quality, and a 20-30 percent increase in overall performance rated by supervisors.

Although compelling statistics, NATA's France cautions that the use of employee assessments in general should be wisely integrated to become part- but not all- of the overall hiring decision by an employer. "Though by no means a panacea, this pre-employment assessment in particular is a very powerful tool in the hiring toolbox," says France. That said, NATA's forthcoming offering, which will be branded as a Safety 1st product, does represent a very powerful hiring tool for aviation employers.

For employers considering integrating pre-employment assessments such as NATA's into their hiring practice, a surprisingly simple- and personal- metaphor is apt: How well do we have to know someone before we are comfortable inviting them to dinner in our home? Even the most gregarious protects the front door of their home before letting a stranger in. It is only a

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personal relationship, developed over weeks, months, or years that provides us the requisite comfort level to invite a friend to dinner in our home.

Yet, in the employment environment, a cursory review of a resume, a brief telephone interview and a face-to-face interview lasting an hour or less is all-too-often the norm for hiring into a great many front line positions. In short order, the candidate we only met for an hour or so will be -metaphorically- living with us, eight hours a day, five days a week. Why wouldn't an employer protect the front door of their company with the same fervor they do their own home?

In this case, the front door of our place of employment is the hiring process, and it should be at least as safe as the front door of our homes. The strength of the various locks, deadbolts, and security systems we use in our homes is analogous to the quality of pre-employment assessments, phone interviews and face-to-face interviews we conduct in the workplace. NATA's soon-to-be-released pre-employment assessment offers an enhanced level of safety to the hiring process worthy of consideration for FBOs and other aviation businesses with safety sensitive positions.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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QUALITY FOCUS

LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

PROCESS MONITORING

APPLIED LEARNING

QUANTITATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

RESPONSIBILITY

SAFETY ORIENTATION

TEAMWORK

WORK ETHIC

WORK TEMPO

MECHANICAL REASONING

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT