

Case Study

This monthly feature shows how business experts have helped entrepreneurs address specific issues that face small businesses.

Business owner turns to personality testing to reduce turnover

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 leadership team for Strategic Print Solutions in Hiawatha turned to personality testing to help improve the company. They are Gail (from left) and Mark Shelton, Casey Ealy and Kim Dixon. Mark Tade photo/EdgeBusiness

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 continue 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.

"To hire the wrong person and put them

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