

Not Another Newsletter!

I was told to do it. Really. It was back in September while casually flipping through a coffee table book (not about coffee tables!) that I was struck with the imperative. Before me was a farmer's almanac of sorts and the topic was calendar symbols - and wouldn't you know, 1997 is the year of the Bird! Actually, it's the Year of the Bird, but I gave myself creative license to interpret

the belief that if our newsletter (like a bird) enters your office unannounced, it will bring good luck to all inside.

So here's the first of what I hope will become a biannual tradition of bringing our clients a balanced and meaningful perspective on some of the important issues being discussed in the human resources and recruiting industries today. We call it

InterViews. Our promise is to always make it humorous, informative and topical. We'll try to keep the Mandrake sell to a minimum and the interest level to a maximum.

And, if it in some way brings you better luck in 1997, then I know it was meant to be. *Tweet tweet.*

Stéfan Danis, Managing Partner
Mandrake Management Consultants

The Reference Check List

One key service Mandrake offers its clients is reference checking. In many cases this involves phoning our current clients to seek their opinion on a person who had once been in their employment or was a prior colleague. The following is a list of things to consider when you are next phoned as a reference.

1. Qualify Relationship

- ✓ Boss or colleague?
- ✓ Years spent working together?
- ✓ Person's position and area of responsibility?

2. Get informed

- ✓ Company, industry, position being applied for?
- ✓ Working environment of prospective employer?
- ✓ Person's most recent work history?

3. Honesty

- ✓ Be fair and constructive in your opinion.
- ✓ Think about the tone of your voice.
- ✓ Summarize with a 0 to 10 key attribute evaluation and explain your rating.

As a final thought, you might consider offering to speak directly with the prospective employer. This small investment in time is very valuable to the company involved and could have a reciprocal return for you in a later situation.

Team up and Skate for Heart

Join the fun on Saturday, April 5th as Mandrake Management Consultants proudly presents its 5th annual "Skate for Heart" Celebrity Hockey Tournament. Imagine the likes of Mahovlich, Sittler, Ellis, Napier and McKenny being one of your two guest teammates. In total, thirty five NHL alumni will be there. This year the event will support The Heart & Stroke Foundation, NABS, and St. Michaels College. Since its inception in 1991 the benefit has raised over \$150,000. Help us make this year another all-star performance. The cost to play is \$1600 per team which includes beer and a team picture. To enter your team contact Stéfan Danis.

Please make all enquiries to

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Debunking the Reference Myth

"Honestly, what can you tell me about Jane Doe?"

"<Gulp> Ah ... well ... Jane was ..."

Most managers who have ever terminated an employee or happily closed the door on one who quit can relate to the inevitable reference check phone call and the moment of internal debate that follows. "Should I give the gal a break or seek some revenge?"; "Should I say nothing or relate what I really think?". Typical response options range from overpraising to bitter, reluctant to sincere.

What course should you follow? Most managers are under the misconception that the safe approach is to say little or nothing at all. The myth being that former managers open themselves to reprisal if they discuss the work habits or behaviour of a former employee, especially if what they have to say is negative.

This fear is unfounded. According to The Dismissal and Employment Law Digest: you have the courts on your side as long as you say what you believe to be accurate and true.

A former employer cannot generally be sued for libel or slander by a terminated employee as a result of a reference, even if the information provided ... is damaging and inaccurate.

The Law Digest goes on to spell out the safe and legal course of action quite clearly – be honest.

If a former employer misrepresents certain specific aspects of a former employee's performance and the prospective employer hires the employee as a result, <the hiring company> could sue the person providing the reference and <his or her> company for damages for negligent misrepresentation.

The general rule we encourage at Mandrake is to seek understanding before providing an honest opinion. If you receive a reference enquiry, ask a few questions before committing an evaluation of the former employee. This will allow you to offer a more constructive response.

By first getting a clear view of the job being applied for and the potential employer's working environment, you are then in a better position to judge the former employee's chances at succeeding within it. Indeed, with a different set of circumstances a previously problematic employee might excel like never before. Remember, your opinion could weigh heavily on that person's career.

So, what do you say in reference to Jane Doe? Get informed, think constructively and speak honestly. Legally and morally this course of action is your best response.

I n T h i s I s s u e

Reference Honesty?

What course should you follow? Legally, The Dismissal and Employment Law Digest spells it out quite clearly – be honest.

Testing Testing 1, 2, 3.

Do managers have to live with this poor success rate? Proponents of formal candidate testing suggest not.

Survey Says?

Find out the typical salary and years of service for people employed at various positions in Marketing and Sales.

Mandrake Services

"We build better businesses"

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• Agency Selection Searches • Mergers & Acquisitions • Image Studies • Networking

“I may have hired an ax murderer” - Isn’t there a test for that?

You can’t test for deviance. Let’s get that on the table up front.

Sometimes it’s impossible to determine that “je ne sais quoi” that inspires one person to invent a new computer operating system while prompting another to create a virus that crashes one. Everything else, however, is measurable and predictive.

For example, here are the typical qualities required to function successfully as a Brand Manager today. They are listed in no particular order.

- Creative Problem Solver, but still practical
- Emotionally resilient, but not too tough
- Motivating and energetic
- Effective as a resource marshal
- Strong business acumen
- Empathetic without being too soft
- A team player but still independent
- Flexible yet highly skilled
- Organizationally excellent and strategic.
- Open minded to significant change.



“Well, the research says no, no, no, but the gut says go, go, go, and the ol’ guy’s never let me down before.”

Formal testing could help you identify the candidates most likely to succeed against this set of criteria. How valuable would that be to you? Before we answer that though, let’s look at your options.

The Interview

With the large quantity of reference material and employment services available to the active job seeker, and the high number of interviews required before actually being short-listed (much less hired), candidates are getting a lot more practice these days - the result is increasing interview savvy.

Applicants look good, and talk smooth with well rehearsed answers. To get the interview they may have even taken creative license with their professionally scripted resume. It’s tough to evaluate an enigma.

“By all accounts, 1/3 of all hiring decisions turn out right, 1/3 are minimally effective and 1/3 are outright failures.”

Add to this, the person conducting the interview has probably received little if any formal training to effectively plan and conduct the meeting. All too often, in fact, the interviewer has been roped in at the last moment to conduct the session with scant opportunity to digest the candidate’s credentials and relate them to the job requirements. When not given the seriousness they deserve, it should be of no surprise that interviews rarely provide the information upon which a sound judgement can be made. That’s why one often ends up with Dr. Jekyll after interviewing Mr. Hyde.

The Reference Check

When companies even bother to perform due diligence in a reference check (i.e. going beyond one or two friendly colleagues to get a slightly more objective opinion), they are still faced with managers operating under the misconception that they are at legal risk if they say anything negative about a former employee (For more information on that subject please see “Debunking the Reference Myth” on page 1 in this issue of InterViews).

Thus, the interview becomes a list of platitudes that say’s little about the person in question.

The Gut Feel

After a short list of applicants is selected, candidates are usually invited to a series of interviews, then hired or not as the result of something called ‘gut feel’. Our trust in this intangible is what has led in part to the situation described by one

industry observer as “a 50/50 crap shoot”. Would you launch a product without some form of consumer testing, putting your faith instead on instinct? The answer is probably “no” if you want to better your chances of success. The same holds true with staff hiring.

The Formal Test

Peter Drucker wrote in the Harvard Business Review: “By all accounts, 1/3 of all hiring decisions turn out right, 1/3 are minimally effective and 1/3 are outright failures.” Do managers have to live with this poor success rate? Proponents of formal testing suggest not.

Testing allows you to hire people better suited to the job requirements, especially as these relate to problem solving approach, work habit, motivation needs, oral and written communication skills, lifestyle priorities, stress management, risk tolerance and others. You could even screen for labour toughness and environmental friendliness if those attitudes were desired.

The net effect is the creation of more balanced work teams, the identification of potential leaders, and an enhanced understanding of the person’s fit within the corporate culture, while providing a predictable and consistent standard for ongoing recruitment. The result is fewer bad hires (which has been estimated as costing over \$20,000 if undetected for six months. For more information on that matter please see “The Costs to Fire” in the next issue of InterViews). In this light, the estimated \$1200-\$1500 for a senior level test seems insignificant in comparison.

Formal testing can also be used to conduct a deeper, more

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...Isn’t there a test for that?

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objective performance review, while forming the basis of a customized employee training program.

“If they’re so great, why do only 15% of organizations use some method of candidate testing?”

At the onset of an internal transfer, testing could also be used to brief a new manager on an employee’s strengths and weaknesses. Testing also has its relevance in building more effective work teams by combining strengths or complementing skills.

Okay ... so, if they’re so great, why do only 15% of organizations use some method of candidate testing? One answer could be that they’ve never thought about it. Another might be that their only foray into this strange land was a horror story - maybe a test eliminated them from the field of candidates vying for a promotion, or maybe still a testing company over-sold them and under-delivered on results. Whatever the reason, don’t discount their value just because everybody isn’t using them.

The 1,2,3 of Testing, Testing

So back to our search for brand management excellence. As noted above, formal testing can be an invaluable recruiting tool. The only hard part being which one to use. Toward that end, there’s no shortage of tests, test developers and testing agents to choose from, with each offering a unique range of strengths and relevance to specific assessment situations. Some tests are better suited to analyzing skills, abilities, aptitudes, behaviour or a combination of these. Some

testing companies represent many tests, while others just market their own.

Mandrake can help you decide which kind of test and/or testing company will best serve you, based on a thorough clarification of the job description or the magnitude of the job searches in question. Alternatively, there are many consultants in the field that can also direct you if required.

Formal candidate testing is no guarantee to a successful hire. Nor can it work alone. Like consumer testing for a new product or advertising campaign, the results are rarely revolutionary. Instead they best serve to confirm or deny management suspicions. Indeed, to be most effective in the search for employee excellence, formal testing should work in conjunction with an analysis of previous job experience, education, references and of course gut feel about a person’s potential handiness with an ax.



“Some of the boxes are big bonus cheques, some are simply severance packages, while others are delicious date squares.”

Survey Says...

Recently, Mandrake conducted an analysis of its database of 70,000 candidates to determine the typical salary and years of service for people employed at various positions in Marketing and Sales. The following is the result.

Marketing		Sales	
Position • Years of Service	Average Salary	Position • Years of Service	Average Salary
Assistant Brand Manager • 18 months	\$50K	Key Account Manager • 4 years	\$60K+Car+Bonus
Junior Brand Manager • 3 years	\$55K+Bonus	Area Sales Manager • 4 years	\$60K+Car+Bonus
Brand Manager • 5 years	\$65K+Bonus	National Account Manager • 5 years	\$65K+Car+Bonus
Senior Brand Manager • 7 years	\$75K+Bonus	Regional Manager • 7 years	\$80K+Car+Bonus
Category Manager • 9 years	\$90K+Bonus	National Sales Manager • 10 years	\$100K+Car+Bonus
VP/Director of Marketing • 15 years	\$125K+Car+Bonus	VP/Director of Sales • 15 years	\$125K+Car+Bonus
VP Marketing & Sales • 20 years	\$150K+Car+Bonus	VP Marketing & Sales • 20 years	\$150K+Car+Bonus
President • 25 years	\$200K+Car+Bonus	President • 25 years	\$200K+Car+Bonus

Please Note. To obtain greater detail about this analysis including salary ranges, get similar information about people employed in Advertising or to initiate a more specific study by certain industry or company size, please contact Stéfan Danis at 922-5400 ext. 240 or Paul Lintner at ext. 204 (Sales) or Keith Turner at ext. 228 (Marketing).