

Hiring for Success

Reduce turnover and increase performance by implementing a hiring system based on behavior-descriptive interviewing.

Story & photo by **Meghan Richey**

Imagine writing a check for 1.5 times an employee's annual salary when you have to refill a position in your company. And if you're replacing a senior manager, imagine writing that check for 24 times their annual salary. Well, in a way, that's what you're doing each time you have job turnover and mis-hire.

"Turnover has a big effect on companies' bottom lines," Leo Bartlett says. "In fact, research from Brad and Geoff Smart in their book *Topgrading* has shown the cost of a mis-hire of a senior manager to be 24 times the person's base salary." Additionally, the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the average cost of hiring just one employee is \$40,000.

Bartlett is president of The Bartlett Group, a consulting firm that develops assessment programs that enable companies to hire peak performers, reduce turnover and maximize the potential of employees. He spoke at the American Meat Institute's (AMI's) Animal Care and Handling Conference Feb. 15, in Kansas City, Mo.

The source of turnover

"Eighty-nine percent of managers think employees leave for better pay, but it just isn't true," Bartlett says. "In reality, 88% of voluntary turnover is due to something other than money." Citing Leigh Branham's book *The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*, he offered the following reasons for turnover:

- ▶ The workplace/job is not as expected.
- ▶ There is a mismatch, or personality conflict, between the job and person.
- ▶ There is too little coaching and feedback.
- ▶ There are too few growth and advancement opportunities.
- ▶ Workers feel devalued and unrecognized.
- ▶ Workers suffer from stress due to overwork and work-life imbalance.
- ▶ There is a loss of trust and confidence in senior leaders.

"That second bullet — mismatch and personality conflict — is the real key," he explains. "In fact, 80% of terminations, both voluntary and involuntary, are the result of a personality conflict with either the supervisor, peers, the environment or the job itself.

"Think about that for a second — employees have personality conflicts with the job itself," Bartlett says. "When companies hire employees, they are really just renting behavior. You have to consider a candidate's existing personality and behavior and make sure it fits your job profile."

Selecting for top performance

"Performance, good or bad, is produced by behaviors and actions that meet, exceed or fail to meet the job's standards," Bartlett explains, noting that our behaviors and actions are motivated by our basic personality traits.

"Every job has a definite set of behaviors needed to produce 'top performance,' and every individual has a preferred set of behaviors," he continues. "Every individual has the ability to flex his/her behaviors, too. The question is, 'How much and how far do they have to flex their behaviors to meet the standards for top performance?'"

To select top performers and meet legal requirements, a hiring system is needed, he says. The first step is to develop a job profile that will be used for initial screening, phone interviews, candidate-to-job matching assessment, development of behavior-based interviewing questions, and reference/background checks.

Bartlett recommends first looking at your company's existing top performers or other experts within your industry when developing a job profile for a position you need to fill.

"These are the people who are going to be demonstrating day after day what your industry's best practices are. Their success is an indication that they have the competencies and behaviors necessary for that job," he explains, adding that those competencies should be used to create the job profile.

Bartlett worked with managers at Cargill and Odom's Tennessee Pride to develop what the companies thought were the 10 top core competencies for an animal care and handling job profile. After considering a list of more than 40 competencies, the companies' managers ranked the following 10 competencies as the most important for an animal care and handling job:

Online tools

In addition to its consulting services, The Bartlett Group offers two valuable online tools — a cost of turnover calculator and a personality-profiling tool — and they're free.

1. <http://profilexpert.com/turnover.asp>. Turnover is expensive and time-consuming to refill positions, but do you know exactly how much it's costing you each year? Try this online calculator to find out. The calculator asks for your input in three areas: 1) pre-hire costs, including cost of advertising the job opening, cost of overtime due to job vacancy, time for résumé review and time for interviewing candidates; 2) time-to-job proficiency costs, including the open position's average monthly salary, time of new hire's adjustment to job ("ramp time") and cost of employee benefits; and 3) trainer's time, including trainer's average monthly salary and percentage of time spent with new hire. The tool then calculates your cost of turnover per job, and if you input how many times you refill positions due to turnover each year, it will calculate your company's annual cost of turnover.
2. <http://profilexpert.com/survey.asp>. After taking a short survey about your work preferences, behaviors and perception of self, this tool generates a fascinating and accurate profile of your personality. Each individual profile includes behavioral strengths, workplace tendencies, behavior flexibility and career mobility, sensitive areas, how coworkers see you, potential reactions to conflict, decision-making style, leadership style, current energy level, motivational needs, stress level, and emotional intelligence.

"This personality-profiling tool is fast, accurate and adjusted for faking," Leo Bartlett, president of The Bartlett Group, says. "Plus, it conforms to federal policy directives, so you can have job candidates take this survey as part of your hiring system to better understand their propensity for success at your company."

- ▶ Character and values
- ▶ Safety orientation
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Determination
- ▶ Intensity
- ▶ Organizational commitment
- ▶ Mental toughness
- ▶ Conscientiousness
- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ Productivity

“Why are these important?” Bartlett asks. “It takes a definite set of behaviors to accomplish each one of those competencies.

“Take character and values, for example. What types of behaviors demonstrate this competency? They take responsibility for their own actions. They avoid gossip. They tell the truth. They treat others with respect,” he continues. “These behaviors demonstrate possession of a competency required for the job profile.”

Once you have developed a job profile, including a list of core competencies and the behaviors required to accomplish those competencies, Bartlett says the next step is posting a position announcement that will attract candidates who are motivated by the competencies.

After initial screening, it’s time to prepare for interviewing the candidates, first on the phone and then in person.

Behavior-descriptive interviewing

“The best predictor of future performance is past performance. People don’t change that much,” Bartlett says. “You have to find out how that candidate has performed in the past, and you have to use behavior-descriptive interviewing to find that out.”

Traditional interviews focus on attributes and opinions, which lead to guesswork and speculation, he says. On the other hand, behavior-based interviews focus on facts of past job performance.

“Typical questions in a traditional interview might be, ‘Why do you think you’re qualified for this job?’ Or, ‘What are your top-three strengths and weaknesses?’ The answers you get from these types of questions don’t really offer you valuable information,” Bartlett says. “They’re nothing but opinions. They aren’t facts that can be verified.”

In fact, by asking those types of opinion-based questions, Bartlett says you put the candidate in charge of the interview and allow yourself to be influenced by them.

Bartlett says behavior-descriptive interviewing is different, because it reveals facts of past performance that can be confirmed through additional questioning of other people who have observed that candidate.



▶ Leo Bartlett, president of The Bartlett Group, a consulting firm that develops assessment programs that enable companies to hire peak performers, reduce turnover and maximize the potential of employees, explains the four basic steps of behavior-based interviewing.

The SARGE method

Behavior-based interviewing follows four basic steps, in what Bartlett calls the SARGE method (situation, action, result, get evidence). Follow-up questions are used to “build a complete picture of the candidate’s behaviors and to turn false-positive reports of behavior into reports of actual behaviors,” Bartlett says. False-positive responses, he explains, are vague statements, opinions, and theoretical or future-oriented statements.

Bartlett describes the SARGE method this way: “First ask a question about a specific situation that would be applicable to the job they are interviewing for. You might say, ‘Describe a situation when you ...’ Next you would ask a follow-up question about their actions. You might say, ‘Describe your specific role in that project.’ Finally, you would ask about results. You might say, ‘What problems or successes resulted from that situation?’”

The final step is to take the information gathered in the interview and verify it.

“You must validate information that you get from an interview,” Bartlett says, adding that the candidate’s previous employers are often a good resource. “If you call a previous employer they legally cannot offer new information, but they can confirm or deny information you present to them that you obtained from the interview.”

Predicting on-job success

Researchers have used the Pearson Correlation Scale to compare the accuracy of traditional interviews vs. behavior-based interviews, finding that behavior-based interviews are far more accurate in predicting on-job success. Traditional interviews typically have a correlation of -0.26, whereas behavior-

Evaluation tips after the interview

Behavior-descriptive interviewing can help you identify how job candidates have performed in the past and are likely to perform in the future. But once you have that information and have verified its accuracy, how do you evaluate it to make a hiring decision? Here Leo Bartlett, president of The Bartlett Group, provides evaluation tips for after the interview.

1. Identify how complete the behavior-based answers were as related to the competencies and job profile.
2. Categorize the behaviors under the competencies. How relevant were the responses?
3. Rate each answer as effective (+) or ineffective (-).
4. Weigh the relevance of each behavior answer considering its:

Appropriateness: How closely does the situation relate to the job?

Importance: How much effect did the behaviors have on the results obtained?

Timeliness: How recent was the behavior applied to the job?

5. Rate each competency, considering the most significant behaviors used to accomplish the end result.

based interviews have a correlation of +0.70 to +0.80 in predicting on-job success.

“If you’re not going to have a hiring system to follow, complete with behavior-based interviewing, you might as well get yourself a nice, big silver dollar,” Bartlett says. “Flip it — heads up you hire, tails up you don’t — and you’ll be right more often.”

When instituting a hiring assessment system and switching to behavior-based interviewing, Bartlett says that top management needs to buy in, understand the process, commit the time and resources, and give it time to work. He says you need to stick to the process even in crisis situations.

“You might feel desperate to hire any warm body; you might need to fill a position relatively quickly, but it’s important to stay committed to the system you’ve put in place,” Bartlett says.

Behavior-based interviews take much longer — both to prepare for and to conduct. A good behavior-based interview will take about 1.5 hours to conduct, he says.

“I know it’s tempting to revert to faster hiring methods when there’s a crisis, but remember the cost of a wrong hire,” Bartlett says. “Take your time and be thorough in finding the right fit, but if you realize you’ve made a hiring mistake, cut your losses immediately. You have to hire slow, but fire fast.”