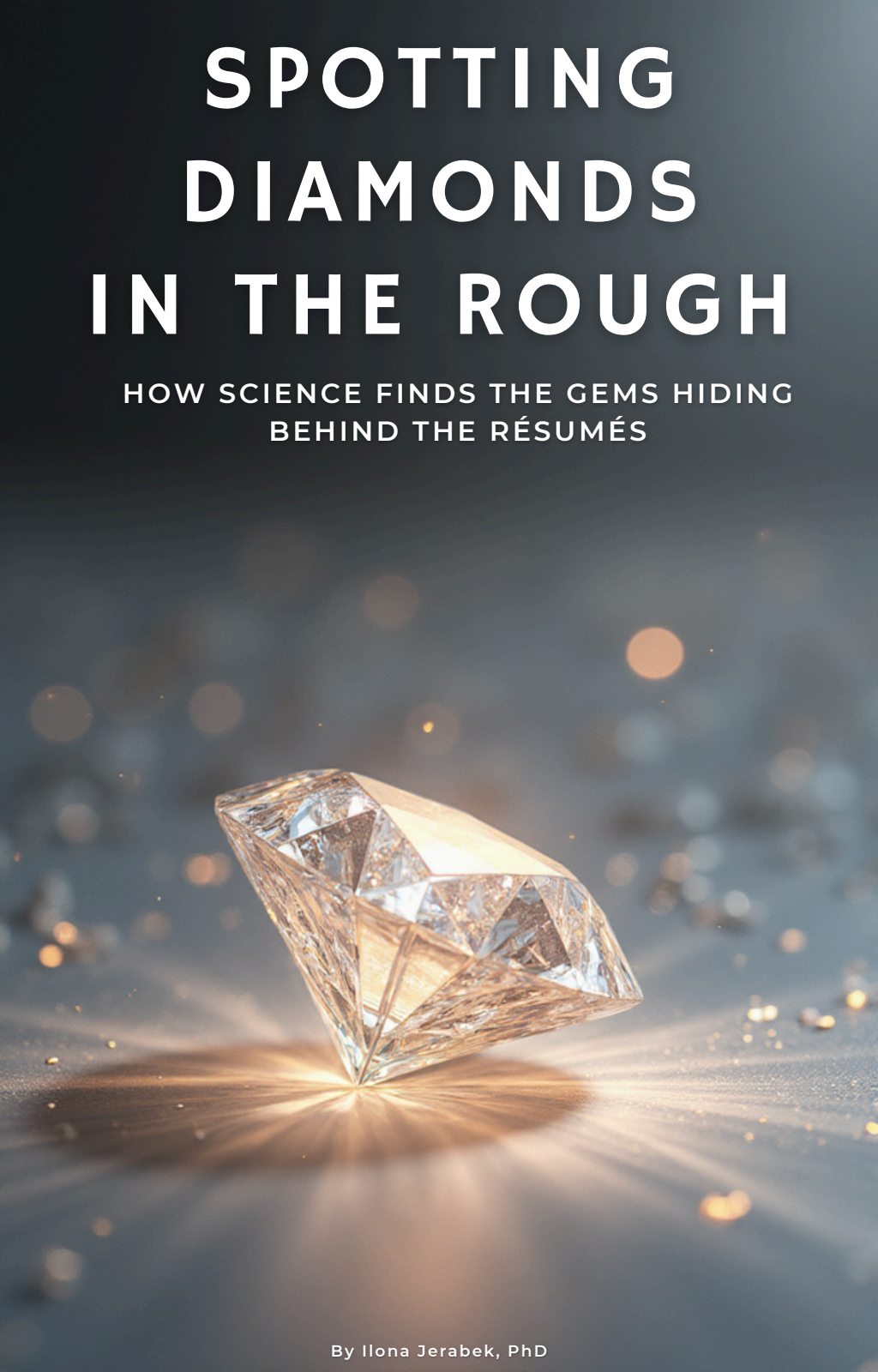
SPOTTING DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH

HOW SCIENCE FINDS THE GEMS HIDING BEHIND THE RÉSUMÉS



By Ilona Jerabek, PhD

AT A GLANCE

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FOREWORD

What's the most dreaded managerial task?

Hiring and firing win this unpopularity contest hands down.

Firing someone is dreaded for obvious reasons. The cost of a bad hire can range from a few thousand dollars for entry-level roles to hundreds of thousands for senior positions. While a few might treat dismissals as a power trip, most managers find them stressful, emotionally draining, and deeply unpleasant.

Beyond the discomfort for both manager and employee, firing affects everyone: morale drops, projects stall, and productivity takes a hit. It leaves behind the sense of collective failure—the employee who struggled, the managers who couldn't develop them, and the hiring process that missed the mark.

Bad hires can't be avoided entirely. Some turnover is healthy—it brings new ideas and fresh energy. But if your workplace starts to feel like a revolving door, it's a problem that demands attention.

Hiring isn't exactly easy either. It can be exciting to welcome new talent, but it also comes with pressure. Managers sift through countless similar résumés, spend a few hours with strangers, and must decide who's right for the job—often based on limited information. And since most candidates are on their best behavior, even experienced managers can make costly mistakes.

When things don't work out, the blame usually lands on the hiring manager.

That's where psychological assessments come in. They offer clear, science-backed insight to help you make better hiring, training, and development decisions.

CHAPTER 1: MIRROR, MIRROR: WHO'S THE MOST HIRE-ABLE OF THEM ALL?





THE HO-HUM HIRING PROCESS

The hiring process has become a lot like our morning routine: predictable, repetitive, and uninspiring.

Most organizations follow the same step-by-step structure:

- Advertise the role and requirements, i.e., education, work exprience
- Review piles of résumés
- Shortlist candidates based on self-reported skills
- Interview them
- Check their references

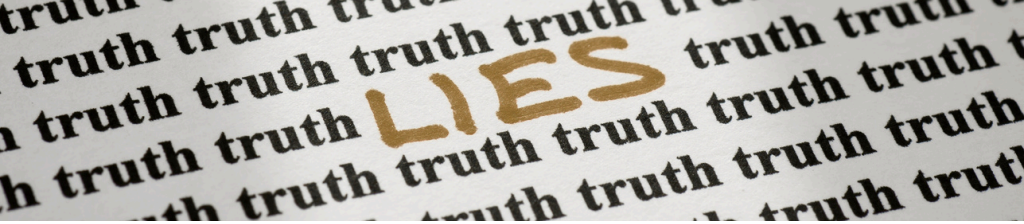
It's a solid foundation—structure and consistency matter, and every candidate should be evaluated in the same way. But it's all just so... tedious.

Every now and then, you might try to shake things up just to do something different. Maybe you throw in an out-of-the-box interview question like, "If you were president of Mars, what's the first law you would enact?" Or you hand candidates a sample task to see them in action (a genuinely smart move), but play distracting music in the background, like the theme from Jaws. Perhaps this time, instead of calling references alphabetically, you'll do it by date of birth. Exciting.

The truth is, traditional screening methods have their pitfalls—and even with structure and creative questions, they can still fall short of revealing who someone really is.

- 6 seconds: Average time spent reviewing a résumé.
- 1 in 3 hires leaves within six months
- 85% of hiring is based on gut instinct.

(Sources: TheLadders, LinkedIn, CareerBuilder)



THE RÉSUMÉ RUSE

According to SHRM, 36% of applicants admit to lying. A CareerBuilder study found 58% of employers have caught false information, and 71% of HR pros say they've seen made-up details about job history, education, or credentials (HR Dive, 2024).

Extracting the truth from a résumé—and reading between the lines—is no easy feat. Here's why:

- **Cookie-cutter résumés:** AI and résumé templates are everywhere, giving everyone that same "polished to perfection" look.
- **Omissions:** Those "mysterious" gaps? Not always innocent.
- **Rehearsed answers**: "My biggest weakness? I'm a perfectionist." Sure you are.
- **Creative spinning:** Some applicants turn their experience into Pulitzer-prize winning fiction:
    - Inflated GPAs
    - Fancy (or fake) job titles
    - Rebranding "we" work as "me" work
    - "Fluent" in six languages… allegedly

Even references can't always save you. Candidates can pick the nicest people, invent a few new ones, or claim it's company policy not to share details.

Of course, not everyone's hiding skeletons—most are just trying to stand out. But to tell real gold from fool's gold, you need more than intuition. That's where psychological assessments come in.



FOOL ME TWICE: HIRING MISTAKES

We all want to be fair and objective. We try to set aside assumptions, stereotypes, and snap judgments. But we're still human.

Here are some of the most common traps interviewers fall into:

Similarity (and Dissimilarity) Bias

- Favoring candidates who remind you of... you (same school, hobbies, playlist).
- Overlooking flaws because you "just click."
- Letting a quirk you don't like (e.g., introversion) color the entire evaluation.

First-Impression Obsession

- Half of first impressions are based on appearance.
- Assuming one strength covers all bases ("Good with code? Must be great with people, too!").
- Writing off nervous or quiet candidates who might simply interview poorly.
- Forgetting that humility in some cultures isn't a lack of confidence.

Lazy Interviewing

- Asking stuff like "Are you detail-oriented?" and not following up with "Prove it."
- Avoiding situational questions that test real-world thinking.
- Rejecting the "almost there" candidates who just need a little training.

Bottom line: Even great interviewers have blind spots. The trick is catching them before they catch you.

CHAPTER 2: ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST: THE COST OF A BAD HIRE





THE PRICE OF OOPS

Meet John Twoface. Top university grad. Glowing references. Charismatic. Sharp suit. Great smile—maybe too great.

Six months in, he's stealing ideas, outshining his teammates, and creating chaos. He gets results, sure, but his methods? Let's just say "ethically flexible." You start to wonder if he was a shark in a past life. (He certainly has the teeth for it.)

Some people look perfect on paper yet leave you regretting the day you said "You're hired." That's why résumés and references alone don't cut it anymore. If your recruitment process has weak spots, there will be consequences—and they're expensive ones.

Here's what turnover really costs, depending on the role:

JOB TYPE OR INDUSTRY	TURNOVER COST (% OF SALARY)
Entry-Level (e.g., Fast Food)	30-50%
Service/Production (e.g., Courier)	40-70%
Skilled Hourly (e.g., Machinist)	75-100%
Clerical/Admin (e.g., Receptionist)	50-80%
Professional (e.g., Accountant)	75-125%

JOB TYPE OR INDUSTRY	TURNOVER COST (% OF SALARY)
Technical (e.g., IT Technician)	100-150%
Engineer (e.g., Chemical)	200-300%
Specialist (e.g., Data Scientist)	200-400%
Supervisor/Team Leader	100-150%
Middle Manager	125-200%

💡 Note: Percentages include all costs—recruiting, onboarding, training, lost productivity, and the hit to team morale. Actual numbers vary, but these reflect what's been consistently reported across studies by the Saratoga Institute and the Jack Phillips Center for Research (Franklin Covey).

A single bad hire won't bite the budget too much. But a few every few months? That'll leave a mark. The smarter your screening process, the fewer "John Twofaces" you'll have smiling back at you from across the conference table.



MATCH NOT MADE IN HR HEAVEN

We've all had *that* job—the one that made it hard to get out of bed, turned Mondays into existential crises, and coffee into a coping strategy. You know the one: the role that drained your energy faster than chasing a toddler on sugar, or a dog after asking, "What's in your mouth?"

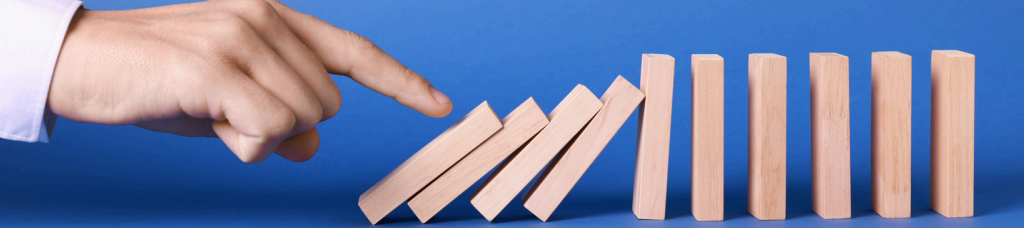
When someone isn't suited to their job, something's bound to go wrong. Even the most dedicated employee can't fake it forever—not without paying a price in stress, sanity, and emotional-support snacks. And whatever drains one person will eventually drain the rest of your team.

When there's a bad fit, a person is more likely to feel:

- Unmotivated
- Disengaged
- Stressed out
- Indifferent
- Pessimistic

Which leads to:

- Low productivity
- Frequent mistakes
- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism (physically present but mentally checked out)
- Cyberloafing ("working" while shopping online)
- And eventually... quitting.



THE ORGANIZATIONAL FALLOUT

If bad hires were a line of dominoes, the individual impact is the first one to fall—the company impact is the crash that follows. One wrong hire can trigger a chain reaction: morale drops because now, the team has to cover for the bad hire who is now gone, and before you know it, the office is so thick with resentment you can cut like cheesecake.

Sure, sometimes letting go of a poor fit can be a relief at first. You might even hear a collective, "Finally!" from the team. But most of the time, a firing rattles everyone. It reminds people that their own jobs aren't bulletproof, stirring up stress, anxiety, and a flood of whispered "Did you hear...?" moments.

Most companies can ride out an occasional misfire. But if hiring turns into a game of roulette, the damage compounds fast. Great employees notice, get tired of cleaning up HR's mess, and leave. The dominos just keep falling.

When you hire well, things stop breaking. People pull their weight, teams get along and work together, and deadlines don't feel like a crisis. You spend less time fixing mistakes and more time actually running the business.

In the end, every company gets the team it hires. Hire well, and everything holds. Hire poorly, and gravity does the rest.

- 80% of turnover is due to bad hiring decisions.
- 60% of companies say bad hires hurt team morale.
- 39% of employers report productivity drops after a bad hire.

(Sources: Harvard Business Review, CareerBuilder)

CHAPTER 3: FROM "HUH?" TO "AHA!" MOMENTS: IMPROVING YOUR HIRING PROCESS





STEP ONE: KNOW WHAT YOU'RE HIRING FOR

Before you even think about posting that "dream job" ad, you need a foundation. Hiring without one is like building IKEA furniture without the instructions—doable, but you'll regret it halfway through.

Start by defining the role properly. Who are you actually looking for? What skills, personality traits, and level of patience for Monday mornings does this person need? You're creating a template, a model, a cake mould.

Here's how to start shaping it:

- **Shadow the current employee.** Watch what they actually do, not what the job description claims. You'll find hidden work, pointless work, and work that needs to disappear.
- **Hit the web.** Browse job boards, check similar job titles, and visit O*NET for inspiration on how to describe the job.
- **Consult the direct manager.** Managers are much better at identifying what really drives performance—more accurately than HR or job ads do, which makes their input essential before you start hiring.
- **Ask the team.** They see where the role fits — and where it drops the ball. Their view can reveal gaps no job description ever will.
- **Think ahead.** Don't just describe today's job—consider what the role will need six months from now. Hiring for the present guarantees you'll be hiring again soon.

- 60% of job descriptions don't reflect what employees actually do.
- Employees typically take on 15–20% more tasks than what's written.
- 30% of new hires leave within their first 90 days due to misaligned expectations.

(Sources: HRSG, LiveCareer, HireHive/Forbes)



STEP TWO: DO THE KSAO BREAKDOWN

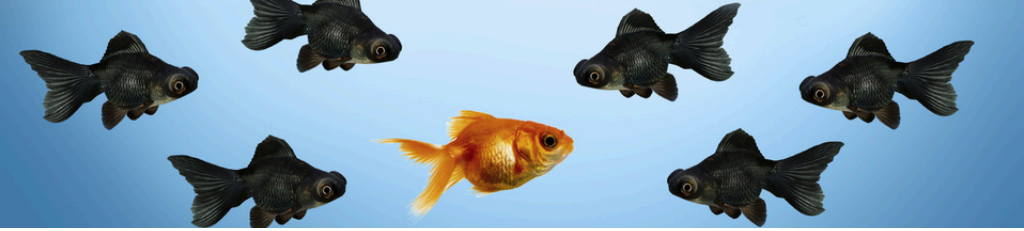
Now it's time to create a profile—the job's DNA. This is where you define the Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other traits (KSAOs) that separate the rock stars from the seat-fillers. Skip this step, and you're basically building a hiring strategy out of tissue paper.

Start by nailing down what success actually looks like in this role:

- **Knowledge:** Like systems, procedures, industry basics, or that weird software only Gary in Accounting understands.
- **Skills:** From writing a clean report to diffusing an angry client without resorting to colorful and creative swear words.
- **Abilities:** Things like problem-solving speed, analytical thinking, or staying calm when everyone else panics.
- **Other traits:** Attitude, personality, work ethic, and that awesome trait of self-awareness.

What else to look for:

- **Identify what's made others thrive.** What do they have in common? Are they quick learners? Natural organizers? Unflappable under pressure?
- **Find the gaps.** What tripped people up? Maybe your last hire had the skills but wasn't good with the social aspect. Maybe they were great solo but hated collaboration. Whatever the issue, name it.
- **Build benchmarks.** If you've got star performers, use them as your baseline. Assess their skills, style, and traits, then measure future candidates against that profile. Benchmarks turn "gut feeling" into something solid.



STEP THREE: SORT THE SHINY FROM THE FAKE

Once you've got your pattern, it's time to see which candidates actually fit it—and which ones just look shiny under fluorescent lighting.

Assess potential hires to:

- Weed out the ones with bad attitudes and worse excuses. Every company has one; you don't need another.
- Spot people whose personality actually fits the job (and your culture). A detail-obsessed analyst who resents deadlines, or a "team player" who prefers teams of one, won't stick around.
- Find the diamonds worth polishing. They might not tick every box yet, but they've got the drive, curiosity, and humility to learn fast.

Remember: skills can be taught; work ethic and attitude can't. You can train someone to use software, but you can't train them to care about customers or quality control.

If you're thinking, "I already do all of this, but I'm still hiring the wrong people," you're not alone. Traditional screening tools give you data, not depth. Résumés and interviews measure how well someone performs under observation, not how they'll behave once their lunch is in the fridge and their working on a team project.

That's where psychological and job-fit assessments earn their keep. They dig beneath the surface, measuring drive, integrity, adaptability, and emotional control—the stuff that doesn't show up in a résumé. Think of tests as your X-ray vision, or the missing puzzle piece you find between the cushions that brings together the whole picture.

CHAPTER 4: FROM PERSONALITY TO MOTIVATION: DIFFERENT TYPES OF TESTS





DECODING HOW PEOPLE THINK, FEEL, AND BEHAVE

The tests you took in school were designed to see what you knew—facts, formulas, and maybe how well you could make it sound like you know what you're talking about. But modern assessments are a different beast. They're not interested in whether you can name all the world capitals or recite the periodic table. They dig deeper into what drives, motivates, frustrates, and occasionally derails you.

These tests reveal what interviews can't: what drives a person, what drains them, and what makes them plot their escape by month three. They uncover values, ambitions, coping styles, and the way someone navigates pressure—or, creates it.

Tests that ask the right questions provide you with the kind of insight résumés and reference checks will never give you. Interviews show performance on stage. Assessments show what happens backstage, when the lights are off and the real personality shows up.

- 82% of companies now use psychometric tests in hiring.
- Tested candidates are 24% more likely to be top performers.
- 89% of new hire failures are due to attitude, not skill.

(Sources: Harvard Business Review, Aberdeen Group, Leadership IQ)



SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENTS: WHAT PEOPLE CAN ACTUALLY DO

These tests measure the abilities, knowledge, and practical know-how needed to perform specific tasks or functions. They show what someone brings to the table right now, not what they might grow into later.

Technical Competency

These assess how good someone actually is at the nuts and bolts of their job. Think of them as "prove-it" tests: less theory, more doing. They can be self-reports, simulations, or interactive problem-solving exercises that look at things like:

- Theoretical knowledge: The background know-how that helps people get the job done—sales strategies, negotiation methods, management principles, that sort of thing.
- Practical skills: Everyday abilities such as decision-making, problem-solving, time management, or attention to detail.
- Experience level: Who's been in the trenches as a manager, for example, versus who's just read management books. These tests make that pretty clear.

Professional / Transferable Competency

If technical skills are the tools, these are the hands that use them. These tests look at how someone communicates, leads, copes, and collaborates—the stuff that matters, regardless of the person's job title. They typically measure:

- Emotional intelligence factors, like empathy, self-awareness, and self-control
- Leadership and management ability
- Coping and stress management
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Assertiveness and listening skills

Hard skills may get someone hired, but soft skills are what keep them employed.



PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS: THE WHO BEHIND THE MASK

If skills tests show what a person can do, psychological assessments reveal who's doing it—the attitudes, motives, and personality traits behind every decision, email, and meltdown. These tests don't measure knowledge; they measure how people think, feel, and behave on a regular basis.

They help answer questions like:

- How does this person make decisions under stress?
- What motivates them to get up in the morning (besides caffeine)?
- How do they handle conflict, pressure, or teamwork?

Personality & Attitude Tests

These are the classics—the ones everyone's taken at least once. They describe patterns of behavior that stay fairly stable over time: how we respond to stress, handle feedback, interact with others, or adapt to change.

There's really no such thing as a "good" or "bad" personality type—only fit. For example, the same edge that makes someone a star in sales might feel like overkill in a non-profit organization.

Most modern personality assessments fall into one of these categories:

- Profiles: The well-known models that group people into broad personality types, such as DISC or MBTI.
- Trait-based tests: The Big Five and similar tests look at where people fall on personality factors like emotional stability, extroversion, and openness.
- Career-focused tests: Designed for hiring and development, these measure traits directly tied to job success—things like reliability, coachability, and growth mindset.

Old-school projective tests (think inkblots and word associations) are, thankfully, long gone from HR. They belong in history books, not hiring decisions.



Cognitive Tests

These measure raw brainpower—the analytical reasoning and pattern-spotting skills that make someone quick on the uptake. Think of them as a workout for your mental muscles:

- Verbal reasoning: Can they understand, interpret, and draw conclusions from written information?
- Numerical reasoning: Can they make sense of data and solve mathematical problems?
- Abstract or logical reasoning: Can they recognize patterns, think strategically, and connect dots others miss?

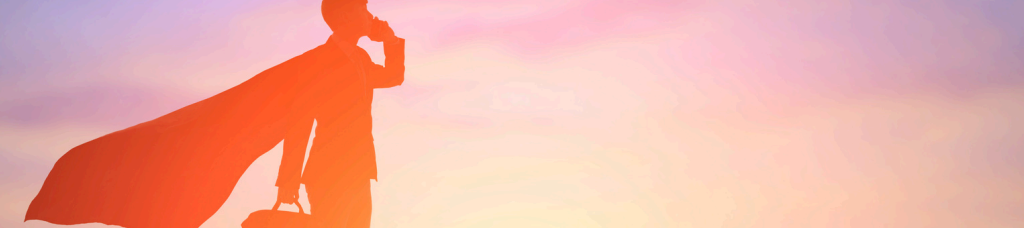
Cognitive ability is one of the best predictors of job performance, especially in roles that demand learning, analysis, or fast thinking. Just remember: high intelligence doesn't automatically mean high performance. A genius with no teamwork skills can easily derail a project that requires collaboration as much as reasoning.

Aptitude Tests

While cognitive tests reveal how someone thinks, aptitude tests show what kind of role they're naturally built for. They measure career-related strengths. For example:

- Clerical aptitude: Looks at accuracy, organization, and ability to handle routine. This is essential for administrative assistants, data-entry clerks, and accounting staff.
- Teaching aptitude: Assesses communication skills, patience, and the ability to motivate and adapt, important for teachers, tutors, and educators in any setting.
- Nursing aptitude: Looks at empathy, composure under stress, and integrity, crucial for nurses, caregivers, and healthcare support roles where precision meets compassion.

Aptitude tests don't measure what someone already knows—they show what they can be good at. They reveal potential.



Motivation, Values & Attitude Tests

If personality shows how people behave, motivation and values tests explain why. These tools dig into the internal drivers that influence effort, engagement, and loyalty. They uncover things like:

- What someone finds meaningful at work (status, stability, creativity, purpose).
- How they approach goals (ambitious go-getter or steady achiever?).
- Their general outlook (optimist, realist, or pessimist).

When matched with personality and skills data, motivation assessments help predict not just performance, but retention. They highlight whether someone will thrive in your company culture or start job hunting by month three.

Psychological assessments are the bridge between can do and will do. They reveal the personality traits, attitudes, and motivations that shape how people apply their skills. They can't read minds, but they come pretty close.

- Cognitive ability predicts about 33% of job performance.
- Companies using aptitude tests see 20–25% higher productivity.
- Matching people to the right roles can cut hiring time by 30%.

(Sources: Schmidt & Hunter, Criteria Corp, SHRM)



360° Feedback Assessments

360° feedback has exploded in popularity because it delivers something traditional reviews cannot: perspective. You get a full-circle view of your strengths, blind spots, and impact on others. Sometimes that feedback is validating; sometimes it's a tough reality check.

How it works:

- A participant completes a self-assessment.
- Raters fill out a similar assessment, scoring the person on different aspects of their work, like how they lead, communicate, and follow through.
- Everyone's input is combined into a report, broken down by rater group.

The raters can include:

- Managers
- Peers
- Direct reports
- Clients or external partners

Because results come from several viewpoints, patterns emerge quickly—the traits everyone notices, and the ones only you thought were invisible. It's honest, balanced, and occasionally humbling.

In other words, a 360° feedback report is less about judgment and more about fuel for growth. It's the difference between "I think I'm good with people" and "Apparently I terrify new interns. Maybe I should work on that."

CHAPTER 5: FROM HIRING TO RETAINING: GROWING, NOT JUST RECRUITING





USING ASSESSMENTS FOR HIRING: FINDING THE RIGHT FIT TO GROW WITH YOU

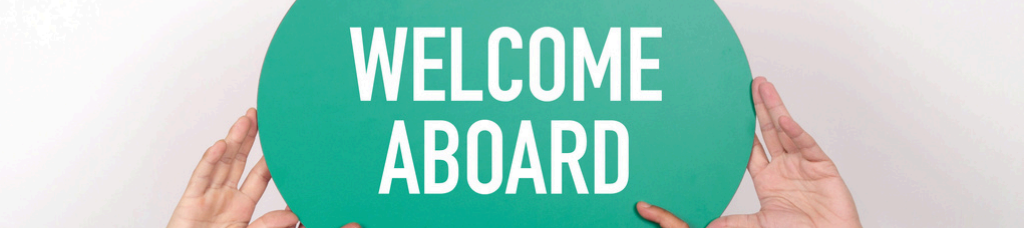
Every great growth story starts with the right cast of characters. Pre-hire assessments help you identify people who not only have the skills for the job, but also the mindset to grow with your company.

Using assessments early in the hiring process creates a fairer and more objective playing field. Instead of relying solely on résumés or gut instinct, you get measurable insight into each candidate's ability, attitude, and potential. That means fewer hiring mistakes, less turnover, and more employees who actually thrive once they're on the job.

Testing before interviews also saves time and energy by filtering out obvious mismatches early. Once you have your shortlist, you can focus on the candidates who not only meet your requirements but show signs of long-term promise. The goal isn't just to fill a role, it's to invest in people who can evolve with it.

Finally, bring those insights into the interview. Use them to dig deeper instead of recycling the same tired questions. If someone's assessment shows they're assertive, ask how they handle pushback from a boss or client. If they scored high on empathy, find out how they balance kindness with tough decisions. If their motivation is achievement, ask what success looks like to them. And if the test hints at a potential blind spot—say, impatience or perfectionism—ask about how they've learned to manage it.

Remember: A great hire isn't always the one who ticks every box. It's the one with curiosity, coachability, and the drive to grow into something even better.



USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS DURING ONBOARDING: GROWING FROM DAY ONE

Hiring someone great is step one. Helping them grow from day one is step two. Assessments make onboarding smarter by giving managers the inside scoop on how to train, motivate, and communicate with each new hire—kind of like getting the cheat codes before you start the game.

If an assessment flags a development area, don't wait for it to become a problem. Use that intel to tweak training and coaching right away. Maybe your new hire likes structure and frequent feedback, or maybe they'd rather be trusted to figure things out. Knowing that early saves everyone from the "learning each other's quirks the hard way" phase.

Assessments also make team integration less of a social experiment. When you already know who thrives on collaboration and who prefers to work solo, you can set people up to complement—not clash with—each other. That means fewer awkward misunderstandings.

Onboarding isn't just about setting up a workstation and walking people through rules and policies, like not heating up fish in the microwave. It's where loyalty and performance start to form. The more you understand how someone operates, the faster they'll find their footing, and the sooner they'll start growing into the person you hired them to become.



USING ASSESSMENTS FOR RETENTION AND DEVELOPMENT: KEEP THEM GROWING

Assessments help you figure out what people need to stay motivated, how much challenge they actually want, and what will keep them from saying ciao and quitting. You can't stamp "mission accomplished" the day they put a cactus and a coffee mug on their desk. That's when the real work starts—keeping them engaged, growing, and excited to stick around.

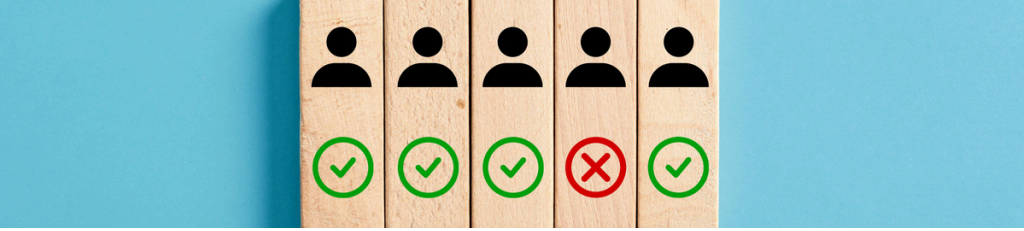
Hiring talented people is expensive. Losing them is even more so. Re-assessments help you spot skill gaps, uncover hidden strengths, and identify who's ready to move up to a bigger role. You might even discover unsung heroes through 360s—or realize that the "great manager" who's brilliant at impressing upper management is strongly despised by their team. You can also add in wellness or therapy-based tests to your Employee Assistance Program... ideally before someone hits full-blown burnout.

And here's the real bonus: when growth is baked into the culture, people stop treating your company like a stepping stone to somewhere better. They start seeing it as a place where they can actually build a career. Assessments make that possible by giving you real data—about motivation, potential, and fit. As a result, teams become more skilled, motivated, and adaptable, managers become better leaders, and the whole organization gets stronger—and no, that's not just fluffy corporate jargon.

In short, assessments aren't about putting people in boxes. They're about understanding them—and using that insight to help them grow in ways that actually matter.

CHAPTER 6: REALITY CHECK: WHAT ASSESSMENTS CAN AND CAN'T DO





WHAT ASSESSMENTS HELP WITH

Assessments aren't magic, but they're the closest thing hiring has to x-ray vision. They cut through résumés stuffed with clichés like "results-oriented professional" and "facilitated end-to-end workflows" to show you who actually has the skills, not just the buzzwords. Used right, they save you time, money, and sanity by helping you look past the "synergy," "agile," and "ROI" crowd to the people who can actually get things done.

When applied thoughtfully, assessments add objectivity to interviews, which are often a very subjective process. Interviews can seem logically organized—the clipboards, the interview question lists—but they're usually guided by instinct and first impressions. There's nothing wrong with listening to your gut; it's part of human judgment. But assessments can help you confirm what your instincts are telling you.

A strong psychological assessment can help you:

- **Filter smarter.** Assess large candidate pools quickly and fairly, focusing only on those who genuinely meet your standards.
- **Spot potential.** Identify strengths that might not shine in interviews and development areas you can actually work with.
- **Create benchmarks.** Build profiles of your top performers so you know what "great" actually looks like.

Assessments can uncover the people traditional hiring overlooks—the ones who don't "sell" themselves well but consistently deliver results once they're on the job. And when you start collecting results over time, you begin to see patterns—not in numbers, but in people. You'll notice which traits and skills consistently show up in the candidates who end up sticking around and becoming top performers, the mindsets that predict long-term success (or burnout, or friction), and the strengths that tend to be unique to each role.



WHAT ASSESSMENTS DON'T FIX

Let's get this out of the way: assessments are tools, not crystal balls. They can tell you a lot about how someone might perform, but not how they'll handle your Monday meetings, that super-talkative colleague, or your CEO's "fun" idea of a team-building retreat. (PSA: if it's at 5 a.m. on a Saturday, involves rock climbing, mosquito bites, and the phrase "we're family," it's not fun.)

For starters, assessments can't replace judgment—yours or anyone else's. If your gut says something's off about a candidate, don't ignore it because their report looks good. Tests don't measure common sense, maturity, or wisdom. They also can't account for what's happening in a person's life. A stressed-out applicant might look risk-averse on paper, and a charming overachiever might test as "ideal" while secretly being an egotistical know-it-all.

And yes, people game tests. Some try to answer like the "perfect employee" they think you want, breezing through questions like, "Am I a team player? Absolutely. Do I get irritated? Never." The good news is that well-designed assessments can catch that nonsense. They use validity checks, situational questions, and clever wording to separate honesty from stage performance.

Still, no assessment can predict every variable. People change, workplaces shift, and sometimes, the person who seemed perfect on paper turns out to be not so good. That's not a test problem—that's just human nature.

So treat assessments like what they are: a powerful flashlight, not a spotlight. They'll illuminate what's there, but it's up to you to interpret what you see. Combine the insight from the test with your gut instinct and good interview questions, and you'll be miles ahead of the companies still hiring based on what the résumé says.

And when companies misuse assessments—treating them like a final judgment or trying to clone the same "ideal" employee—they make expensive hiring mistakes. Smart job candidates notice when the interview feels like a box-ticking exercise instead of a genuine effort to understand them. The goal isn't to test more, it's to test smarter.

CHAPTER 7: THE SCIENCE OF A GOOD TEST: WHAT TO LOOK FOR





MAKING SURE A TEST ACTUALLY WORKS

A test can ask smart questions and target the right skills, but it's only trustworthy if it performs well statistically. In other words, it has to prove it measures what it claims to measure, and that it does so consistently.

Think of it like software: you wouldn't launch an app before checking for glitches and making sure it actually does what it's supposed to. The same principle applies to hiring tools. Assessments need to be backed by research and tested for reliability and validity before they're used to make real decisions about people.

The **American Psychological Association (APA**) sets the gold standard for test development and validation. (You can read their official guidelines here: APA Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing).

Here's what to look for when evaluating a test's quality:

Reliability

- Cronbach's Alpha: This is the statistic that shows how consistently and how well the test items work together. Look for a reliability score of **0.70 or higher**.
- Scales with more questions tend to be more reliable, but they also take longer to complete. It's a trade-off between precision and practicality—short tests save time, but they often do so at the expense of reliability.

Validity

Validity means the test actually measures what it says it measures, like sales aptitude or emotional intelligence. To confirm this, developers run validation studies, which are research studies designed to check whether the test works as intended. Researchers do this for medications, for example.



Here's what the validation studies must show:

1. Who Was Tested

Make sure the people used in the research are similar to the people you plan to test. If you're hiring for customer service, the study should include people who actually do that kind of work—not just a bunch of psychology students earning extra credit.

2. How Many People

In general, a reliable study should have at least 500 people who took the test. The more detailed or wide-ranging the test (for example, one measuring multiple traits or skills), the larger that sample should be to ensure accuracy.

3. What the Research Found

Job relevance: If the test is meant for a specific job—say, sales—then people with sales experience should score higher than those without. That shows the test is measuring real, job-related ability.

Fairness: The test should not unfairly disadvantage anyone based on personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or disability. These groups are referred to as "protected groups" under employment law.

The **EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)** in the U.S. provides legal guidelines on fairness. If there's more than about a 10% difference in average scores between a protected group and everyone else, the test isn't fair.



HOW TO TELL IF A TEST WAS BUILT BY PROS

A reputable test provider should let you see sample questions or a demo. This helps you evaluate whether the test's structure fits your organization's needs.

Test Design

- Does it cover all the traits and skills you actually need?
- How long does it take to complete? (Keep our caveat about length and reliability in mind.)

Test Questions

Good assessments ask clear, relevant, and fair questions. They should be:

- Related to the job or skill being assessed.
- Written at a reading level appropriate for your candidates.
- A mix of straightforward statements (e.g., "I am punctual") and scenario-based items to reduce obvious "right" answers.

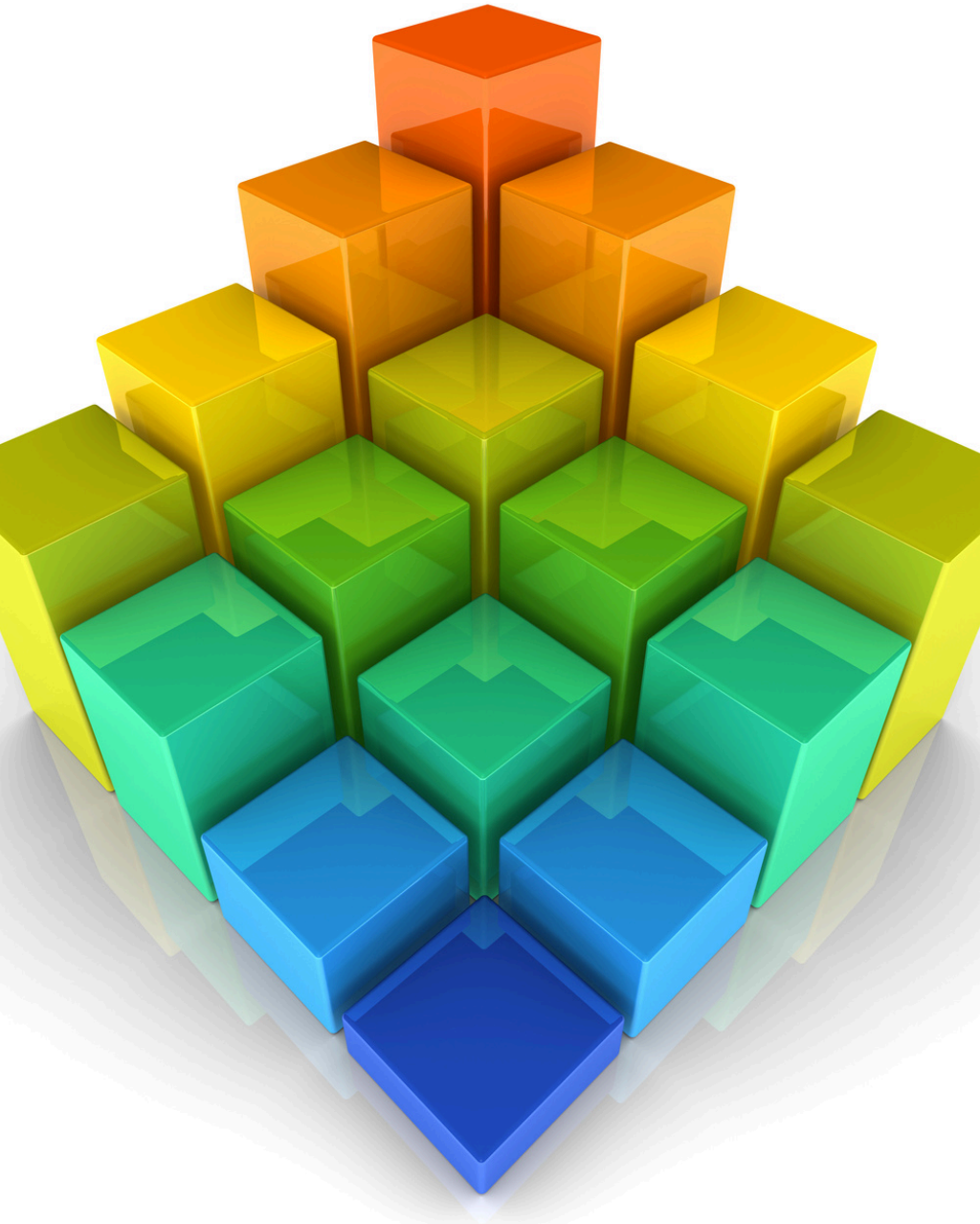
Strong tests include built-in honesty checks—scales that spot when someone is trying a little too hard to look good. They're often called *Impression Management* or *Social Desirability* scales, and they're especially useful in hiring situations.

Test Report

When you get the results, you should be able to understand them without a PhD in psychology. Look for:

- Easy-to-undertand graphs showing the person's scores.
- Definitions of each trait or skill, or a scale list with explanations available on request.
- Straightforward interpretations of what high or low scores mean for job performance.
- Strengths and growth areas.
- Useful and actionable development tips.
- Comparison tools (industry or internal benchmarks).
- Interview questions customized to each candidate's results.

CHAPTER 8: YOU HAVE THE REPORT—NOW WHAT?





THE MYTH OF THE PERFECT HIRE

When you're evaluating new hires, there's almost always a gap between what a role demands and what a person can offer right now. The goal isn't to find the mythical "perfect fit." It's to figure out which differences you can live with, which you can train for, and which will eventually drive everyone crazy.

Perfect candidates are like unicorns: everyone wants one, but no one's ever seen one. So when reality kicks in—your budget's tight, the role is specialized, or the talent pool is a puddle—here's how to decide what you can live without.

Skills first. If a compromise needs to be made, start here. Skills can be taught; personality usually can't. Hire a person who's adaptable, coachable, and a good cultural fit even if they need training. A motivated learner will outpace a brilliant bully every single time.

Personality next. A big gap between who someone is and what a job demands can take a toll. For example, an introvert can survive in sales for a while, but daily cold calls and regular networking will eventually drain them. Skills fatigue is fixable; personality fatigue isn't.

Prioritize by impact. Not every job requirement is critical. Rank what matters most for performance and what can be developed later.

If you need someone to "hit the ground running," focus on technical competence—but remember you may only get a short-term fix. When possible, follow the old rule: *hire for attitude, train for skill.*

In practice, this means:

- Compare what the person brings against what the role truly needs.
- Identify where additional training or behavioral adaptation is realistic.
- Plan how to close those gaps and what resources it will take.
- Measure progress after training or mentoring.

A "gap" isn't a dealbreaker. The smaller and more specific you make it, the faster someone can grow into the job you actually need done.



HOW TO HELP PEOPLE CATCH UP

Bridging the gap between what someone can do today and what the job will demand tomorrow isn't a solo thing. It's a partnership with homework on both sides. Employees have to show up ready to learn, and managers have to give them more than tired corporate-y slang like "We're investing in your growth journey!" Don't tell someone you want them to "reach their highest potential" and then hand them a broken ladder.

Start by playing to people's strengths. Give them something they can actually handle first—or at least something that won't end in a spectacular crash-and-burn. Confidence builds through small victories, not trial by fire. Once they've got their footing, raise the bar a little. It's a better plan than the classic "Welcome aboard! You'll figure it out!" strategy.

Next, mix and match your people. Pair up people whose strengths complement each other. The visionary who dreams big and the implementer who knows how to make it happen. The perfectionist who spots every flaw and the pragmatist who says, "Good enough—ship it." The confident presenter who can sell an idea and the quiet researcher who makes sure the facts actually hold up. Mentorships and shadowing aren't just feel-good HR fluff—they're how experience gets passed around instead of sitting in one person's head.

Then, manage humans like actual humans. Some people thrive on structure; others need space to experiment. Some live for teamwork; others would rather stick a fork in a socket than join another brainstorming session. The best managers don't force everyone into one mold—they figure out what works for this person, right now, and adjust accordingly.

You can't close every skill gap overnight, but you can chip away at it day by day. Momentum counts more than speed. When people feel supported, challenged, and trusted, they don't just keep pace, they get better. That's how you build loyalty.



CONCLUDING POINTS

If you want to cut turnover and stop hiring "great on paper" disasters, keep these in mind:

- **Know what you actually want.** What skills, traits, and values matter most? If your wish list sounds like a Marvel character, it's time to get realistic.
- **Use tests, not guesses.** Assessments aren't crystal balls, but they do a better job than "that person seemed nice in the interview."
- **Ask deeper questions.** Use the test results to dig where it matters. Skip the "What's your greatest weakness?" nonsense.
- **Pay attention.** Anyone can recite answers they Googled. The interesting part is how they react when you go off-script.
- **Weigh your trade-offs.** Missing a skill? You can train it. Missing self-awareness? That's a tougher fix.
- **Trust the data, but don't ignore your gut.** If the red flags are flapping wildly, stop assuming it's something you can fix.

And most importantly...

Keep polishing your diamond. No one is flawless. The best hires start with potential and a bit of a rough edge. Your job is to spot it, shape it, and help it shine.



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