

The Perfect Match

Part two: How to write a person specification

Last month we discussed how you format person specifications and stressed the need to be specific in describing what your ideal candidate is like. This month, we ask:

How Do You Decide if the Candidate Actually Has Those Qualities?

- If a job requires a degree in nuclear physics, you ask for the degree certificate.
- If you want experience you look at the candidate's CV.
- If you want someone who is extrovert you judge them at the interview.
- Is this enough ? No! We need to sharpen up your assessment criteria.

If you depend on CVs: DON'T! Research shows that a high percentage of CVs has mistakes or lies in it.

References won't tell you much about a person except that he/she actually did work where they said they did

Interviews are good for finding out certain things, but beware. Just because you like or dislike someone doesn't mean they'll be good or bad at the job. Specific assessment criteria – a particular question – in a structured interview can help.

Don't rely on qualifications. A degree in English doesn't mean a person can communicate well in a business context. Examples of their work may well be better; so might tests.

Tests make your decisions easier. You want some one with "a good level of Maths" then "Someone who scores better than 95% of his peers on a particular maths tests" removes the imprecision. Assessing personal qualities – creativity, personality and motivation – can also be helped by test results by defining the quality precisely and measuring it without personal issues intruding.

The Virtuous Circle

How you write your person specification, how you assess the candidate and the details of the recruitment process influence each other. To make sure the system works you have to run round the circle a few times to ensure they make sense. And, if you do it right, the person spec will even outline the development activities you need to offer the successful candidate in those first few months.

A personal specification isn't a legal requirement but is, obviously, covered by law. Beware of breaking equal opportunities legislation in the way you define the requirements of a job.

So, I'd suggest a person specification should be formatted like this:

	Essential for the job	Desirable for the job	Training/Development Offered	How Is it Assessed (and what success means)
Knowledge				
Skills				
Qualifications				
Personal qualities				
Previous experience				
Personal situation				

The cells should be filled with statements as precise as you'd use when setting objectives in a business plan. The work put in at the beginning will ensure a more seamless, accurate process...and it soon becomes second nature.

Maybe the successful candidate won't stay married to the job forever, In fact, if one of the essential personal criteria is "ambition" they shouldn't stay in the job for long. Their CV and a good motivation test will identify people who prefer short, intense, romantic relationships!

But a good person specification is one of the foundations of good recruitment, increasing successful placement and maybe offering opportunities for added value services in defining development plans.