

CONSULTANTS' SHOWCASE

THE SEQUENTIAL SELECTION SYSTEM® : THE KEY TO HIRING BETTER PEOPLE

BY ERWIN S. STANTON

Probably the most commonly accepted definition of management is ". . . the process of meeting the organization's goals and objectives through the effective use of its people." And it becomes almost immediately obvious that the first step toward the proper use of an organization's human resources is to hire the right people. That is the purpose of our firm's *Sequential Selection System*.®

Far too many personnel specialists, as well as staff and line managers, waste a good deal of unnecessary time in the recruiting and selection process. As a result — to paraphrase a popular expression — they may work "hard," but certainly not "smart." The objective of the *Sequential Selection System*® is to offer a tried, proven and practical method to recruit, interview and select personnel objectively, tactfully and expeditiously while simultaneously complying with all government equal employment opportunity requirements. Specifically, the *Sequential Selection System*® is a step-by-step system designed to optimize the time of the interviewer so that he or she can more quickly and effectively select qualified applicants without spending a lot of unnecessary time in fruitless and nonproductive activity.

The system is intended for the professional, full-time personnel specialist who is responsible for

providing staff support to other departments throughout his or her organization and who is concerned with developing better ways of recruiting, interviewing and selecting applications for a variety of positions. In addition, the system can also be used by line and staff managers to select people, whether they have available to them the full-time resources of a professional personnel department to help them in recruiting and screening of job applicants, or whether because of operating conditions they must handle the entire staffing process themselves.

The system consists of a semi-structured process that provides the interviewer with certain concrete tools, techniques and strategies that will give the necessary degree of support, yet at the same time permit the required flexibility to adapt the system to the specific needs and circumstances of his or her own organization. An integral part of the system are such vital assists as: equal employment opportunity-compatible application, employee reference and interview rating forms; objective, essential and legally defensible interview questions; and a concrete conceptual model to enable the interviewer to evaluate and assess the qualifications of the job applicant in keeping with current government requirements.

Interviewers can be trained in the system by means of a two-day, in-house training program that can be adapted to an organization's

particular requirements and which features a series of simulations to enable each person to directly apply the system by interviewing and subsequently evaluating an actual job applicant for a typical position with his or her own company. Our firm can provide the necessary training for an organization's personnel specialists as well as line and staff managers; or as an alternative, we can assist a company's own staff to implement the system themselves and to license the organization in its use.

The Seven Steps

Effective staffing and total success in recruiting and selecting truly contributing people who will be an asset to an organization requires a certain amount of time, effort and careful attention through the entire employment process. As previously indicated, however, all too often both personnel specialists as well as line and staff managers spend an inordinate amount of time without accomplishing very much. The purpose of the *Sequential Selection System*® is to offer a more streamlined staffing system to recruit and select competent applicants promptly without wasting undue time on unqualified candidates. Let us take a quick look at each specific step in the system:

• *Understanding Equal Employment Opportunity Requirements* — Over the course of recent years, we have seen vast and dramatic social and political changes throughout our country which

have had a major impact on the management and operation of all organizations, both profit and non-profit. Of particular significance has been the emergence of a broad array of laws, government regulations, federal guidelines, court decisions and interpretive rulings affecting the employment and utilization of minority personnel and women. As a result, both personnel practitioners as well as managers at every level must be thoroughly informed with respect to all present equal employment opportunity requirements. This step is intended to acquaint participants with current EEO requirements and to indicate what under existing regulations they may and may not do.

• *Establishing Accurate, Realistic and EEO-Defensible Job Specifications* — Before the recruiting, interviewing and selecting process can even begin, we must first obtain a precise description of the particular job to be filled and get a very clear idea of all relevant, essential and job-related aspects of the assignment. Only after this very important step has been taken will we then be ready to determine the precise specifications needed by the successful job applicant.

• *Innovative Applicant Recruiting* — To a great extent the success we shall have in selecting really competent employees is a direct function of the quality and quantity of the applicants we have been able to recruit and to attract to our company. If we are to have any type of truly selective employment system, we must have a sufficient number of well-qualified applicants to choose from. This step focuses on the importance of an innovative and continuous recruiting program and takes a close look at some of the more useful and creative recruiting sources that can be utilized.

• *Initial Applicant Screening* — Having succeeded in recruiting a satisfactory number of possible job applicants, our next step is to screen out those who, for one critical reason or another, are clearly not suited for the position. Here a very definite distinction is



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made between *initial* applicant screening and the more detailed and in-depth selection interview that will take place at a later stage in our system. In this fourth sequential step, attention is focused on specific ways in which unqualified applicants can be expeditiously, sensitively and tactfully screened out.

• *Checking the Applicant's Employment References* — Applicants who have successfully passed the initial screening stage should now have their prior employment references checked. In this step, we focus on the importance of conducting a thorough reference check of all the applicant's former employers using a specific structured telephone format developed by our firm.

• *Conducting the Structured Selection Interview* — Following the strategy outlined in the system, the less-qualified job applicants by now have been expeditiously rejected. Those candidates who have successfully survived these pre-

liminary hurdles are now given a thorough selection interview which is the focus of this step.

• *Evaluating the Applicant and Arriving at a Decision* — Having obtained all the essential, necessary and job-related facts regarding the qualifications of the applicant, we are now ready to arrive at a final decision — whether or not to hire the candidate. In this step, a conceptual model is offered to assist the interviewer to objectively and legally evaluate and assess the total qualifications of the job applicant.

Advantages of the System

The Sequential Selection System® has achieved excellent results in many different types of profit and nonprofit organizations all over the country. The reasons for its practical usefulness are:

1. *It saves a great deal of time.* The system basically streamlines the entire staffing process by minimizing the amount of wasted time. Applicants who are not qualified are speedily rejected, thus freeing the personnel specialist and manager to engage in more useful and productive activity.

2. *It improves the prediction of probable future job success.* As a result of this system, the ability of the interviewer to predict the applicant's future on-the-job performance will improve substantially.

3. *Personnel turnover is significantly reduced.* Through better selection, fewer marginal or unsatisfactory applicants will be hired, and a larger number of potentially successful candidates will be brought into the organization.

4. *Personnel staffing becomes a smoothly operating function.* The system is designed to facilitate the entire staffing process so as to minimize the incidence of acrimony or discord that so often accompanies other employment systems or strategies. Perhaps most important is the fact that the system is well-accepted by job applicants who feel that they have been given fair and complete consideration of their application for employment. As such, it is very likely to im-

prove the organization's image in the community and to enhance its public relations.

5. *The system is completely compatible with all equal employment opportunity and affirmative action requirements.* By following the system, an organization's entire staffing program will be completely in keeping with all current government requirements in this vital regulatory area.

Traditionally the *Training and Development Journal* has focused on the numerous dynamic methods and techniques that can be used to train and develop personnel effectively. It certainly would be superfluous in this publication to underscore the importance of training to organizational effectiveness. However, we should not lose sight of one critical training caveat and that is, if the wrong employee has been selected initially, no training program or motivational system — no matter how well-conceived and designed — is likely to compensate adequately or offset the original error made in hiring such a person. Succinctly stated, then, effective personnel selection is the prelude to successful training and development.

We believe that the Sequential Selection System® is capable of making a significant contribution to the optimum use of an organization's human resources.


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