The old adage 'People are your most important assets' turns out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are.

— Jim Collins, Author of Good to Great

Topgrading is a continuous process of identifying and developing top talent to enhance overall organizational vitality.

— Bill Conaty, Sr., V.P. Human Resources General Electric

TOPGRADING

HOW TO HIRE HIGH PERFORMING MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL

By Bradford D. **Smart**, Ph.D.

If you are reading this article, you value talent, you really do! But if you're like most managers, hiring people is a major challenge and source of frustration. Recruiters don't do a good job screening people, resumes are deceptive, so-called competency interviews are easy for candidates to fake, and candidates only want reference checks with their buddies. Surveys of thousands of managers show that only 25% of people they hire turn out to be the high performers they feel they're paying for. About half their hires are "disappointing but adequate."

The good news is that you can dramatically improve your hiring success by using common sense methods you'll learn in this article. I've conducted 65,000 verbal case studies, asking managers (including many maintenance managers) to describe their hiring methods. I've borrowed some of their successful methods, added some ideas of my own, and for three decades have fine-tuned the most practical advice. This article explains four practical methods that have helped leading companies such as GE, Honeywell, and Lincoln Financial achieve 80% – 90% success selecting talent.

1. **Early in the hiring process, let candidates know that in order to get a job offer, they will (at an appropriate time) be asked to arrange for personal reference calls with former bosses.** High performers, the people you want to hire, will be happy to do this, and C player candidates will withdraw. Perfect! And all candidates will be quite honest in interviews, knowing they will be arranging reference calls.

Suggestion: If you use recruiters, require them to tell candidates this requirement.

2. **Recruit from your network of high performers you know or have personally worked with.** The thousands of high performers I've worked with say this recruitment method is quick (high performers are in your PDA), effective (candidates are already prescreened), and inexpensive (no recruiter fees).

My son Geoff is CEO of the largest Topgrading company and author of *Who: The A Method for Hiring*, in which the world's most successful managers share their most valuable recruitment method: hire from your own network and get high performers to refer more high performers.

Suggestion: Ask your top performing maintenance personnel to stay in touch with the sharpest people they know, people you might consider hiring.

3. **Use the chronological Topgrading Interview, the most powerful hiring tool.** Many companies use round-robin interviews for potential new-hires. This is a series of interviews where the candidate interviews with different personnel (such as managers, supervisors, human resources personnel or potential co-workers) one at a time.

If you use round-robin competency interviews, keep them and allow time for candidates to talk and ask questions about the company, culture, etc. However, just realize competency interviews ask questions such as, "When was a time you were a good team player?" and are so easily faked by candidates that only twenty five percent of high performers are hired.

The Topgrading Interview is the "silver bullet. All managers we know of hiring 90% high performers use the Topgrading Interview Guide. It's a "road map" for interviewers. A micro version that will enable you to immediately hire better is this:

FOR EVERY FULLTIME JOB, ASK:
a) What were your major successes (and how did you achieve them)?
b) What were mistakes or things you wish you'd done differently?

For a) and b) use follow up questions to get specifics about every key decision and every key relationship.
c) Who was your boss, and what were his/her strengths and weaker points?
d) What would that boss tell me were your strengths, weaker points, and overall performance in a personal reference call we might ask you to arrange?

The chronological interview reveals patterns of how the person evolved over time, and that is what enables you to clearly understand what the person is apt to be like in the near future. It works. There are dozens of documented case studies.

Suggestion: Use a tandem partner — two heads are a lot better than one and the two of you ask the most follow up questions for the most recent jobs. In a 1 ½ hour interview you will get a complete picture of how a maintenance candidate performed in every job.

4. **Ask finalist candidates to arrange personal reference calls with former bosses.** Early on in the process, you informed the candidates this would be required. High performers are happy to do this, and 90% of former bosses will talk. "C" players can't get those former bosses to accept reference calls — gee, I wonder why!

Suggestion: You and your tandem interviewer make half the calls each, after the candidate gives you the times references are available and the numbers to call.

SUMMARY
Use these four of the ten most important Topgrading best practices, and you will join the ranks of thousands of managers who have found the solution to the chronic problem of hiring the best people available for the pay. You will improve your hiring success.

Dr. Bradford D. Smart completed his doctorate in Industrial Psychology at Purdue University, entered consulting, and since the 1970s has been in private practice as President of Smart & Associates, Inc., based in the Chicago area. Brad is frequently acknowledged to be the world's foremost expert on hiring. He has conducted in-depth interviews with more than 6,500 executives and is the author of seven books and videos.

If you would like to learn all ten Topgrading hiring methods, you can download the free 50-page eBook, "Avoid Costly Mis-Hires: Hire 90% High Performers with Topgrading Best Practices." Visit www.topgrading.com *to download your free copy.* «