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# Pre-job tests weed out imperfect fits

## Programs grow in popularity

By Patricia Bathurst  
SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

More than half of American workers admit to lying to supervisors, management consultants say. More than 60 percent use the Internet for personal use during work hours, and more than 30 percent admit to stealing and/or abusing drugs or alcohol.

With those numbers in mind, it is no wonder that pre-employment testing is a high-growth industry, with human resource professionals reporting that more than 60 percent of U.S. employers have increased assessment programs since 2001.

Tests range from simple skills to sophisticated behavioral interviewing, such as "describe for me your ideal job situation." There also may be credit checks and drug testing.

If you are a job candidate who will face pre-employment testing, be prepared to sign an informed consent, agreeing to the tests and, depending on the type of tests used, take a written or online questionnaire that takes 15 minutes.

"We believe a balanced approach, with employers using background and credit screening, with psychological and integrity testing as needed, helps eliminate hiring high-risk employees," said Russell Johnson, president of Merchants Information Solutions Inc., a credit information and collection management company in Phoenix.

The company recently expanded its services through acquiring American Tescor, an Oregon-based company focused on psychological and integrity testing. Merchants already had added a company called Personnel Profiles, which focuses on "accurate, fast, and state and federal regulatory-compliant" background checks.

"We're licensed private investigators," said John Evans, director of sales. "We don't necessarily start with credit reports: You need a really good reason to look at those, unless it's a position involving money. But we do a social trace, for address history, and a county criminal search. And we use public records."

Phoenix-based American Barcode and RFID has a specific corporate culture that



Mike Stryczek, chief executive officer of American Barcode and RFID, creates and uses pre-employment tests as part of ordinary applicant screening.

emphasizes integrity and strong values. The company uses testing tools to find candidates who will adhere to the company's ideals.

"We use a value-driven survey," President Michael Stryczek said. "The average U.S. population scores on this an average 30; we consider only candidates who score 40 and above."

"We're not a company of clones, but we need to hold similar values."

One step that American Barcode and RFID took won the company praise from human resource specialists: The company benchmarked each position, a process critical for using

testing effectively to screen candidates.

"You have to think of the requirements of the job and go beyond the hard skills," said Ted Szaniawski, a principal with the Tempe-based HR Group. "If you don't understand the job, how do you know who to put into it?"

The screening also provides some security for current employees, notes Peter Bullard, president of American Tescor.

"Good people deserve to work with good people," he said. "The questions are direct. There's no subtlety here: 'Do you like to steal?' 'Do you use drugs?' There's a cognitive dissonance that comes into play;

you'd be surprised at how many people have convinced themselves that smoking pot is legal."

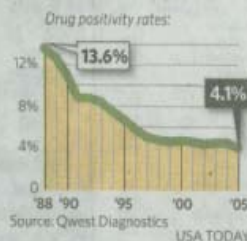
While skills and integrity testing can help assess a candidate's fit for a company and position, personality testing may not be appropriate or even helpful, according to management consultant Ken Kasner. His company, Positive Options in Sedona, frequently works with companies in developing tests that directly reflect company needs.

"Most (personality tests) aren't reliable, valid measures of workplace skills," he said.

He doesn't discount the fact that multiple factors, includ-

## Drug detection falls

Of more than 7.3 million drug tests conducted by Qwest Diagnostics in 2005, 4.1% of the results were positive.



## Taking pre-employment tests

"People have negative experiences with tests, so they can be scary," says Ken Kasner, owner of Positive Options in Sedona. He offers some tips for job candidates facing pre-employment tests of any type:

- Work on your own anxiety level about testing.** You will do better if you are not overstressed about possible results, especially when there are no genuinely wrong or right answers.
- Give a real picture and be straight with your answers.** Most tests are designed to find conflicting responses through built-in validity scales.
- Be really clear about what (position) you want.** Be aware of whether the work environment is one you want to be in. "Some environments are places (in which) you can grow, some are not." Kasner also said, "You can probably find samples of some of the more commonly used tests online. But you can't look at all of them, and you can't really predict what you're going to experience."

ing personality traits, can affect job performance, and some tests provide ways to assess that.

Ginny McMinn, owner of McMinn HR in Gilbert, has concerns.

"I have some reservations about them (tests). I think there is a potential for overreliance and misuse, especially when companies use the same test across the board," she said. "I do think it's worth doing if the company culture is very strong, or if they don't add people very often. Many people will fit well into a range of environments, but some people fit better in specific environments."