

New assessment service launched for professional services firms

A pioneering new service geared at dealing with the costly and threatening problem to smaller professional services firms of recruiting the wrong candidate for a senior vacancy has been launched by Human Assets, a leading consultancy involved with helping firms choose, develop and engage talent.

The new service, branded the Critical Appointment Assessment Service, is being offered at an introductory rate of only £250 plus VAT, available until September 30, 2005. From October 1, 2005 the fee will revert to the normal price of £500. The service - essentially an expert second opinion about a candidate a firm is on the point of recruiting - uses a variety of testing techniques of proven effectiveness to investigate the mission-critical personality, interpersonal and general work skills possessed by a candidate short-listed for a key appointment in smaller professional services firms. The aim of the service is to choose the best talent to drive the business forward to greater commercial success.

Correctly identifying the person with the necessary skills and qualities to excel in a senior role is a core issue for all organisations. For smaller firms, getting the right person to fill a senior level position is of particularly crucial importance. One poor appointment will make a much greater negative impact within a smaller firm, and can even be the difference between that firm's success or failure. As Charles Woodruffe, Managing Director of Human Assets explains: "Smaller professional services firms simply have no margin of safety for diluting the overall excellence of the service they offer with a single poor appointment."

The Critical Appointment Assessment Service is completely customised to an individual firm's particular needs. It is aimed at firms with between 15 to 100 staff. Such firms would typically not have their own HR department. The service involves an initial discussion with a qualified business psychologist from Human Assets to discuss the requirements of the post and the firm's key values and culture. Human Assets then chooses the most appropriate tests and assessment techniques to help identify whether the firm's chosen candidate is a good fit for the job.

These rigorous, state-of-the-art assessment tools can reliably predict a candidate's future job performance and avoid the heavy costs associated with inadequate selection decisions. The tools assess the candidate's numeracy and verbal reasoning, their normal behaviour and personality and also their darker or more extreme behaviour that may only show itself when work becomes stressful.

After the assessment, Human Assets provides a comprehensive report of the candidate's strengths and development needs as well as specific recommendations about how well they are likely to perform in the role and within the organisation. The service also includes an individual feedback session with the candidate about the assessment results.

"Unfortunately, too many smaller professional services firms focus



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excessively on candidates' technical skills when recruiting," explains Mr Woodruffe. "This is partly because the firms find it so much harder to evaluate softer interpersonal, personality and work skills such as how well the candidate will fit in with the firm's culture, the impact the candidate will have on clients, their leadership skills, how they react to pressure and stress, and how quickly that person can pick up new skills.


"Getting the fit right between the candidate and the firm is also enormously important," Mr Woodruffe explains. "The candidate must display the cultural approach and character the firm wants not only so that the candidate gets on with other members of the firm, but also so the candidate is comfortable with projecting the firm's cultural attitude and approach to client organisations."

There is general agreement within all the professional services that the skills demanded of senior practitioners in smaller firms differ significantly from those required in large firms. As Mr Woodruffe adds: "In smaller professional services firms, all staff tend to be client-facing, but this is particularly true of senior people. For them, skills at dealing with clients personally are absolutely essential. Because in smaller firms the

personality of senior practitioners plays such a crucial role in winning and retaining business, even relatively small weaknesses in the calibre of their professional performance and the personalities they project can easily lead to clients losing confidence and to the firm losing business."

Mr Woodruffe also points out that smaller professional services firms tend to deal direct with the owner/manager of their client companies. "This is an additional powerful dynamic in favour of the need for the consultant or practitioner of a small firm to be of a particularly high calibre."

Mr Woodruffe explains that he has launched the service because several small professional services firms had approached Human Assets in recent months with problems arising from having appointed the wrong person to a business-critical position.

"What we were finding," Mr Woodruffe says, "is that hard-working small professional services firms, which began a recruitment process with the very best intentions and tried hard to be fair to every candidate, were frequently winding up hiring the wrong person for the job. We undertook careful research to investigate this and concluded that smaller professional services firms had a particular need for the most careful and objective assessment of candidates' personality and interpersonal skills and traits." 

For further information about the Critical Appointment Assessment Service, please contact Charles Woodruffe, Managing Director, Human Assets, Tel: 020 7434 2122 E-Mail: charles.woodruffe@humanassets.co.uk.