

Why Do Some Candidates Look Different in the Interview than in Performance Profile Results?

Let Me Tell You a Little Story...

It's not uncommon for me to get a call from one of my clients, after he sees the Performance Profile Results Report for a candidate, who says something like, "This report doesn't look like the person I interviewed!" What's going on when even experienced interviewers' impressions about a candidate vary from the way the candidate looks in the Performance Profile Report?

The confusion comes about because of the difference between results from structured, validated questionnaires, such as the Performance Profile, and interview impressions.

It's worth our time to look at these differences more closely.

Performance Profile Results Are Objective

The Performance Profile Assessment (PPA) is based on validated questionnaires, which means that we have data from over 25,000 managers who have completed the PPA that shows that the questionnaires measure what they are designed to measure—that is, underlying personality characteristics that affect behavior. The PPA results are based on facts about human behavior.

The Performance Profile Looks at the Whole Person

The Performance Profile often reveals problematic issues that don't show up during an interview. Remember, when you hire a person you don't get only the strengths that a person brings to the job; you get the whole person, "warts" and all. And the candidate, understandably, doesn't want those "warts" to show in the interview.

The Performance Profile Reduces Performance Anxiety

Performance Profile questionnaires are administered online, with the candidate alone in front of a screen. The absence of an interviewer reduces the pressure

created by sitting face-to-face with someone who is evaluating you and it leads to more unfiltered responses.

How does the Performance Profile provide objective results? Let's look at a few ways:

Correction for the Effort to “Look Good”

The Performance Profile includes our Reality Check Technology™ that objectively corrects the effect of a candidate's effort to make a good impression in his answers to the questionnaires. It gives you more accurate information about the candidate's actual behavior preferences.

Performance Profile Questions Do Not Vary

The questions that candidates answer in the Performance Profile questionnaires are the same every time, and are presented in the same order. No candidate ever gets more, or fewer, or different, questions. This consistency insures a “level playing field” for all who complete the Performance Profile.

No “Forced Choice” Responses

Questions that allow only a “yes or no” or “true or false” answer force people to choose between two answers, neither of which they may completely agree with. Performance Profile questions give the candidate the opportunity to find a satisfactory “sometimes-more-than-other-times” response that more accurately reflects how he or she feels.

Interview Impressions Are Information Based on Opinions

Interviews with a candidate are good at giving you an impression of how a candidate handles himself in a pressure situation, how well he prepared for the interview, and how poised and confident he can appear to be when he has had time to prepare.

Everyone is Motivated to Look Good in an Interview

The candidate's behavior in the interview is going to be slanted toward the favorable. A motivated candidate is naturally trying to make a good impression and he has a relatively short period of time to do so. His goal, during the

interview, is to make sure the interviewer sees more of his strengths, and as little as possible of his liabilities.

So, what you see in the interview is probably closer to the best behavior the candidate has to offer rather than necessarily representative of his typical behavior.

The Problem with Interview Impressions

Interview impressions are subjective. No matter how structured the questions or format of the interview, the impressions gained from an interview are based on the interviewer's perceptions, opinions, attitudes and biases (both the ones he's aware of and the ones he isn't.) How does this happen? Let's look at a few reasons.

Good Days and Bad Days

Interviewers are human. That means that on any given day, an interviewer may do a better job at asking questions, probing into unclear answers, or observing reactions than on other days, when fatigue, worry about a child's trouble at school, or a persistent headache can affect their impressions of a candidate.

Even the best interviewer can have a bad day.

On the other hand, the Performance Profile never has a bad day.

We Like Some People More than Others

Each of us naturally feels more drawn to some people than to others, and interviewers are no exception. Even the most careful interviewers can be unaware of how their judgment is affected by simply empathizing with, or not empathizing with, a candidate.

Interview Questions Vary

The number and type of interview questions will naturally vary somewhat from one interviewer to another, and from one interview to the next, depending on the time available and other factors. Some interviewers dislike asking questions that seem intrusive or challenging, and, as a result, they may avoid pressing for clearer or more specific answers.

The Bottom Line on Interview Impressions

Interviews are good at providing a “gut check” on how a candidate handles himself in a pressure situation. What they don’t do is provide objective data about underlying strengths and liabilities that allow you to make a fair comparison of a candidate with the job requirements he will face.

The Map or the Ground?

Have you ever been driving, relying on your GPS map to guide you through an unfamiliar area, only to discover that your GPS map is urging you to drive into a lake? As Dr. Gordon Livingston once said, “If the map doesn’t agree with the ground the map is wrong.” In other words, go with the objective facts.

Here’s the Answer to the Question My Client Asked

The impressions you gather from interviewing a candidate may vary in some particulars from the results of the Performance Profile because these two processes *look at two different kinds of information* –objective (Performance Profile results) and subjective (interview impressions.)

Does this mean that your interview impressions are wrong? Not necessarily, but it does raise a warning flag that means it would be a good idea for you to carefully examine what the difference between interview impressions and Profile results could be telling you about this candidate.