

Teeing Off

Why golf could be the ultimate hiring test **By Alan Davis**

IN YOUR WORDS

I WISH I could play a round of golf with every long-listed candidate before deciding whether or not they would make the short list. Not because I need the course time, but because I believe it's possible to make a legitimate argument that this could be one of the best hiring tests of all time.

A round of golf, for example, would allow the interviewer to observe the candidate's behaviour. You would quickly see how they deal with group dynamics, pressure, set rules and suggestions for improvement. You would also experience their interpersonal and social skills firsthand.

None of these parameters bear any relevance to playing ability. And all of these parameters are directly relevant to the candi-

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date's ability to perform effectively at work—the very same performance parameters that are so difficult to assess in the artificial setting of the job interview.

However, given that a significant proportion of the population has absolutely no interest in golf and that our climate would only allow this sort of test for a few months of the year, there are other venues that can take the future employee out of the office and add value to the selection process. Breakfast, lunch and dinner scenarios can be useful, for example. It's hard to be overly formal with food in your mouth. My favorite is dinner, even though it means forfeiting my evening.

During the meal I look for the obvious things. Clearly, if the candidate drinks too much and becomes loud and obnoxious, that's a clue. I also find it interesting to observe how hard a candidate works to keep the conversation going and purposefully lapse into silence to see if the candidate will pick up the ball. I would

argue that social skills are just as important as specific knowledge and experience, depending on the job.

Dinner is also an excellent opportunity to discuss respective styles and our expectations of each other, in a more relaxed atmosphere than a typical interview. I recently was told of a situation where a newly hired sales executive quit after two months because he felt he was being micro-managed. Had he and his boss discussed the issue at the interview stage, they may have worked out a suitable compromise, or another candidate who didn't mind being micro-managed might have been selected instead.

I believe that hiring decisions should be based on objective analysis and informed choice. You'd think most employers would agree, but while it's typical to see businesses put a lot of time into their investments in things such as equipment or property, it is equally typical to see hiring decisions made after one interview. Even at that, the one interview is typically unstructured and conducted by a manager who has been provided with little or no training in the art.

So what's the ultimate hiring process? Well, it's extensive. For a high-level employee, the process from end to end should be: telephone conversation, initial face-to-face structured interview, second interview with hiring manager and some peers, psychometric evaluation (including simulation exercises), detailed reference check, a "social" final interview to discuss mutual expectations, and, of course, a round of golf.

Having made the argument that golf is an effective way to screen candidates, I have found that it is also an equally effective way of observing how my clients behave in pressure situations. If they toss their clubs after a bad shot and stomp off to find solace at the bar, that usually isn't a good sign. I once played a round with a client who decided to no longer keep track of his score once he started losing.

Of course, one doesn't have quite as much control over choices in clients. And, come to think of it, in those instances, it was probably me that was being put through the "golf" test. ♻️

Alan Davis (adavis@alandavis.com), has managed recruiting campaigns both in Canada and overseas for 25 years, including one for astronauts for the Canadian Space Agency. He is also an avid golfer who is entirely deserving of his 24 handicap.