Would You Hire Employees Based on Their Handwriting?

Can you predict a potential management hire's performance based on their handwriting? Some business owners, and an entire industry, think so.

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JANUARY 31, 2013 Donald Trump's charge that Jack Lew is "very, very secretive" is based on his reading of the unusual, loopy signature of the White House nominee to head the Treasury Department. Trump says he often relies on handwriting analysis to gain insight to people's personal characteristics. So is graphology something business owners should look into for hiring and other applications?

Most scientific investigations of handwriting analysis as a tool for reading character suggest it has limited value. However, the practice is widespread in Western Europe and, while less common in the U.S., still has adherents.

One User's Experience

Carol Cline-Ong, co-founder and CEO of Las Vegas commercial property brokerage and management company MDL Group, has used handwriting analysis since 2000 to screen candidates for upper-level jobs at the 28-person firm. "It's amazing what we get out of it," Cline-Ong says.

MDL finds out whether candidates are good fits culturally, whether they have potential for substance abuse and even whether they are being misleading about their suitability for the job, Cline-Ong says. If problems arise later with an employee, when she reviews the handwriting analysis report, the warnings were always there, she says.

Candidates asked to provide a sample for analysis are usually skeptical, but uniformly come away impressed with the insights it provides. "It's worth the money," Cline-Ong says.

The Graphologist's View

Mark Hopper, founder and president of Phoenix-based Handwriting Research Corp., has provided handwriting analysis to business clients since 1983. "Our client base is pretty diverse—banks, hotels, high-tech businesses, everyone from businesses that have one person to clients with thousands of employees," Hopper says.

Hopper says most clients come from personal referrals, and he's usually hired by a firm's CEO rather than by a human resources executive. The reason, he says, is that HR professionals are trained to be skeptical of handwriting's value as a predictor of job performance, while CEOs are more open-minded and are only interested in whether it works.

Hopper claims it does. Clients who once had fewer than half of new hires become successful employees may find more than 90 percent succeed after he screens them using handwriting analysis. "The reason we're still in business is that the analysis is usually pretty good," he says.

How Graphology Works

The principle Hopper works on is that the loops and swirls of handwriting constitute behavior, and behavior indicates personality. In one common application, he'll examine samples from a firm's top performers, looking for certain personality traits.

Then he'll seek to identify job applicants whose writing indicates similar traits. For instance, a firm might find that its most successful salespeople have handwriting that shows they're outgoing, competitive and persistent.

A quick screening to identify promising salespeople among a crop of applicants costs $15 per sample. After trimming applicants to a handful, Hopper might do a more rigorous analysis, for $225 apiece. That might generate 15 to 20 pages of commentary about a prospect's likely future performance.

Graphology clients usually start out skeptical but curious, Hopper says, after having gotten a personal referral from a previous client. Business owners typically submit a sample of their own handwriting for him to look at, then progress to a trial involving existing employees. By the time he's accurately analyzed several personalities for free, he says they've become believers and are ready to pay for the service.

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