



# ROLLING THE DICE ON NEW EMPLOYEES-

BY KYLE SALEM

In the casino world, employee turnover is a never-ending nightmare. With staff turnover rates frequently approaching 80%, according to Martin R. Baird, Chief Executive Officer of Robinson & Associates, a customer service and employee satisfaction organization, the cost of human capital might be the largest expense casinos endure.

While some organizations resign themselves to the fact that poor staff retention is unavoidable, others have taken a more proactive approach. In this article, I will discuss two gaming organizations working hard to reduce staff turnover and increase employee engagement. They utilize pre-employment assessments to gain a deeper understanding of their candidates – and increase their odds of a successful hire.

## ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING

Among the largest human resources teams in the Canadian Gaming industry, Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) has been a pioneer in hiring and retaining their best people. But even this innovative group must adjust with the times, and currently they are implementing some very forward thinking ideas.

According to Maria Graham, Executive Director of Human Resources Gaming at OLG, they used to believe that if a candidate had 3-5 years of customer service experience, they would surely succeed. In fact many casino executives look at resumes, see customer service experience and figure the candidate is a must hire. However, Graham notes, “it’s not so much the experience people have, it’s if they have the right personality to perform on the job.”

Today, OLG is moving away from hiring people based on skills and experience, and instead focusing on better understanding candidates’ personality and attitudes.

This has long been a consideration for their senior level positions, but now they are implementing this approach when hiring throughout the organization, including for floor supervisors in their casinos. “Making the right hiring decisions on these staff is critical. You can be the most wonderful GM, but if you have poor supervisors it won’t work,” stresses Graham. In fact, Graham herself cited numerous studies in this very magazine in July 2006, stating that immediate supervisors have a “significant influence on the employee’s attitude, approach, behaviour and engagement.” And indeed, having the right temperament for the job is critical to being successful, engaged and performing at one’s peak.

To help understand their candidates’ temperament, OLG uses psychometric testing provided by human resources consulting firm, The McQuaig Institute, and have since 2000. Shortlisted candidates complete a fifteen minute on-line assessment which Graham states “helps support or challenge our gut instincts whether we have made the right decision.” Relying simply on interviewing candidates is an insufficient way to truly understand personality. A recent Michigan State University study confirms this belief, noting that while 90% of all hiring decisions are made based on interviews, they are only 14% accurate. Why? Because as proficient as interviewers can be, candidates today are just as well prepared for questioning, and have stock answers at the tip of their tongues.

## “RELYING SIMPLY ON INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES IS AN INSUFFICIENT WAY TO TRULY UNDERSTAND A PERSONALITY.”

Despite recent changes made at OLG, evaluating potential employees will remain front and centre. “The old adage is that employee behaviour drives customer behaviour, and customer behaviour drives business performance,” says Graham. And if OLG’s efforts to hire and develop great people succeed, their bottom line performance will surely be a winner as well.

### SASKATCHEWAN GAMING CORPORATION

Unlike OLG, who have brought their focus on personality and attitude from the top down, the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation (SGC) is going from the bottom up. This was decided after conducting an internal study and finding that their high turnover can be most significantly reduced by focusing on floor level staff. Doing so is expected to generate a major cost savings for the organization, including less time and money spent hiring and training new employees, lower advertising costs and more.

“Dependability, reliability and integrity,” are the three buzzwords repeated by Michelle Pasker, Human Resources Consultant at SGC, and an Organizational Development specialist, for defining their ideal candidates’ virtues. They feel that focusing on these traits will result in better hiring decisions, higher retention rates, and a more productive and engaged staff. To this end, SGC also decided to incorporate candidate assessments. They wanted one that would be easy for managers to understand, easy for candidates to complete, and of course reliable and valid. At the same time, they wanted a tool that could be expanded and used at the corporate level down the road, once they were ready to push the resource upward.

The Food and Beverage area was selected to sample assessments because of their high turnover rates and the fact Pasker previously held this portfolio. “It is a very entry level position,” Pasker said of the Food and Beverage positions. “Candidates basically need a Grade 10



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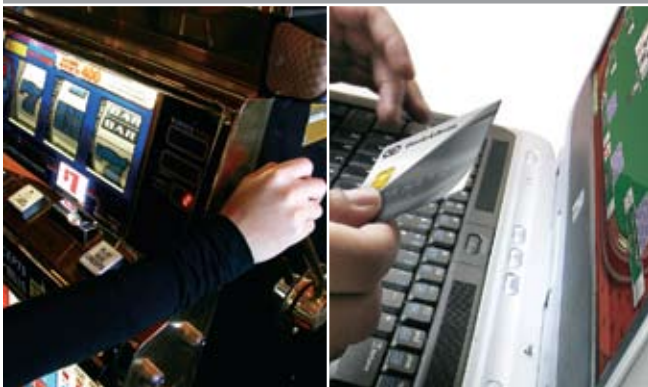
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(education), though they have to be 19 years of age to work here. For a lot of them it is their first job.” Moreover, with their Food and Beverage area being so fast paced, their need for a quick and reliable tool made for the perfect proving ground.

To sample psychometric tools, SGC first created an ideal candidate profile, then assessed a number of candidates, hiring three. One was a strong match for the position compared to the benchmark created, a second was a potential match, and the third did not match at all. Over the next few months Pasker observed the progress of the three individuals, and was amazed at how prophetic the assessments were. For the candidate that did not match the job, not only is attendance poor, but they are “struggling to motivate him, exactly what was predicted,” said Pasker. Conversely, “the candidate who was a strong match is just excelling.” In fact for this candidate, Pasker expects to monitor his growth and give him more advanced work. Of course, this is a task she is more than willing to embrace as it should lead to having an outstanding, promotable, long-term employee.

Beyond hiring, coaching and developing staff can be extremely time-consuming. Managers need to learn quickly what to monitor in their new employees, and how to help them focus on their strengths while nipping problems in the bud. With a 90-day probation period and a unionized environment, SGC sees this as the window for managers to separate the wheat from the chaff. At the end of the day, according to Pasker, “you are going to have much less turnover, better retention, and better customer service.”

Whether your staffing problems lie on the floor or within upper management, using employment assessment tools will provide an excellent barometer in determining how well your candidate fits the job, and if they are likely to succeed. As Pasker says, “if we can reduce our turnover and better develop our future leaders, it’s going to be huge.” ■

*Kyle Salem is a Senior Consultant with The McQuaig Institute®, offering pre-employment assessment tools which help more than 1,200 clients worldwide, including many casinos, measurably reduce turnover and increase staff productivity and engagement. Kyle can be reached at 1.800.387.5455 or [ksalem@mcquaig.com](mailto:ksalem@mcquaig.com).*