

Legal firms swoop on the right candidates

Three solicitors' firms which have experienced high staff turnover use The McQuaig System™ to pinpoint the most suitable candidates out of thousands of potential legal trainees, and to identify those most likely to stay for the long haul.



fitting into a particular team. This is vital to Fisher Meredith, where all employees are arranged in teams," Hewitt says.

Greg Powell, who founded Powell Spencer in 1977, acknowledges that external factors, such as "unrelenting hard work", contribute to the high turnover of staff. He was looking for a way to address this issue and read about The Holst Group. He decided to pursue The McQuaig System as a means of

selecting people who might stay longer and help the business grow.

"We had experience of employing people whom we thought suitable but then they didn't fit into the ethos of the firm," Powell says.

Powell points to the role of Holst Associate Richard Robinson as an important 'comfort factor' in the McQuaig process.

"Richard offers an additional level of expertise that we are able to call on whenever we need it. He is essentially an account manager who visits regularly; helping out, troubleshooting, and giving added value from training onwards. This is hugely valuable, and very rare."

The challenge

Thousands of law graduates have their hearts set on a legal career, so when firms advertise for a handful of trainee positions they are swamped by the response.

The industry has a high turnover of staff, resulting in enormous financial costs that include retraining and advertising, and additional pressure on existing workers. But firms such as Fisher Meredith, Powell Spencer and Campbell Hooper are aiming to deal with the issue by stemming the flow at the source – selecting the right trainees.

Confident interviewees who perform well are often selected over people who may have had a more appropriate temperament for the position. Also, as interview styles vary, there usually isn't a benchmark for a firm to select the right person for the specific role, rather than simply the most qualified candidate.

The Holst Group was the natural choice for the firms, whose aims were to reduce staff turnover and to develop their businesses by ensuring the right "fit" of people within the partnerships.

The solution

The McQuaig Assessment and Development System is an aptitude and occupational assessment procedure that helps identify a candidate's temperament and personality type, and allows an employer to compare candidates against the requirements of the position.

Vikki Weller joined Campbell Hooper as head of human resources three years ago after eight years with an engineering consultancy that had used McQuaig. "There, turnover had dropped significantly and McQuaig was a key part of that," Weller recalls.

Weller was keen to replicate her previous success with McQuaig at Campbell Hooper, a firm with 18 partners and a total of 100 employees. She wanted to use the system to help narrow down recruitment candidates, or when trying to best place successful applicants within the firm.

"The turnover of staff was very high when I joined, which was an

enormous cost to the firm. We were choosing people who looked good on paper but we were not necessarily looking at the cultural fit. This contributed to the

high turnover," Weller says.

Stephen Hewitt, managing partner of Fisher Meredith, says that pre-McQuaig, selection was a matter of chance.

"Previously, there were inconsistencies in the way interview panels went about conducting the interviews - there was no scientific way of determining an individual's ability and the likelihood of them

"McQuaig has enabled Fisher Meredith to tailor development plans to individuals much more readily than before. Before, it was guesswork – now, we have some type of analytical framework which enables us to layer development plans upon it."

Stephen Hewitt, Managing Partner, Fisher Meredith

"McQuaig helps us to make a much better fit between jobs and potential candidates and the selection process is rational and coherent."

Greg Powell, Partner, Powell Spencer

The results

Fisher Meredith's Hewitt says that McQuaig has proved itself when it comes to selecting the most appropriate trainee, and that it has enabled new recruits to develop within the firm in a way that suits their style, encouraging them to remain there.

He recalls recruiting for a paralegal, a fairly junior post that required working for many people, something that would mean a lack of autonomy.

"We saw one person who was over-qualified for the job but who showed very high levels of independence," Hewitt says. "He was quite dominant and saw himself as having leadership qualities."

While the paralegal position would have been inappropriate, McQuaig testing revealed that the star individual would comfortably fit into the firm's future plans.

"We found another, newly created, post for him," Hewitt says.

Powell, of Powell Spencer, says that The McQuaig System can identify different work styles, which helps when considering potential trainees and the direction they might follow, as well as ensuring a good mix of people within the firm.

"There are two distinct types of lawyer: criminal lawyers who tend to be driven, goal-oriented and who like people; and civil lawyers who tend to be conforming, who don't need a high level of personal contact, and who are quite content concentrating on their cases," Powell says.

He now uses McQuaig to try to recruit people as trainees who would have long-term prospects in the firm – "people who would be partners."

Weller, of Campbell Hooper, said The McQuaig System's effect is palpable when dealing with hundreds of applications for the three to four

trainee legal positions available each year.

"It also has some currency in influencing how Campbell Hooper deals with recruitment selection. It gives a more objective approach, as opposed to being subjective or selecting on gut feel "

The McQuaig System has enabled Campbell Hooper to continue appointing the most appropriate

trainees, ultimately contributing to the reduction in staff turnover. It has standardised Fisher Meredith's interview procedures so that each potential trainee competes on a level playing field and has given Powell Spencer the means to maintain a good mix of people within the firm in order to build its business. This has all been possible because The McQuaig System brings an independent, scientific approach to the selection process – the value of which should not be underestimated.

"Someone might come across well socially and sell high during the interview, but then fail to deliver. McQuaig helps draw that out – you can see in a profile that it might occur, so you could be extra diligent when checking that person's background and achievements. It's a small part of a bigger picture but a very important part."

Vikki Weller, Human Resources Manager Campbell Hooper

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