

HIRE.DEVELOP.PERFORM.

3 STRATEGIES THAT SEPARATE MYTH FROM FACT IN CONTACT CENTER HIRING

Based on the 2011 ICSA
presentation by Suddenlink
Communications and FurstPerson

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Introduction

On September 20th at the International Customer Service Association (ICSA) conference in San Antonio, Texas, Barbara Morrison, a Human Resources Director for Suddenlink Communications, and Jeff Furst, President and CEO of FurstPerson, presented a case study titled Separating Myth from Fact: Hiring for Peak Performance and Service.

Based on this discussion, FurstPerson has summarized three key strategies that enable contact center hiring managers to separate myth from fact when developing and operating contact center hiring processes.

These three strategies can be applied to any contact center organization.

Contact center hiring faces many challenges. But, if these challenges are not solved and poor hiring decisions become the norm, the contact center suffers a financial penalty. Based on FurstPerson's study of attrition costs in 2009, the average per agent cost of attrition is \$4,284.73.

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While attrition is expensive, hiring new employees who perform poorly on the job can lead to additional financial penalties. Customers who contact you but do not get their issues resolved may defect to competitors. New agents in production that have higher average handle times may force you to unnecessarily increase headcount to meet service levels.

The following three strategies are used by Suddenlink Communications to reduce risk in their hiring process and improve the probability of putting the right agent on the phone with their customers.

1.Understand and Define the Job

Frequently, contact center organizations do not have a factual basis behind their perceptions of the contact center job. And, when those jobs change, the hiring model does not adjust based on the changes. This leads to hiring managers bringing their own views about the job into the hiring process. The net result is a failure to understand and define the job.

Suddenlink has used multiple job analyses to carefully define their contact center jobs

and keep them updated. The job analysis process enables hiring managers to survey subject matter experts currently working in the job or supervising the job to identify key job requirements. These job requirements can be defined in terms of the competencies (abilities, behaviors, and skills) that allow a new hire to be successful on the job.

FurstPerson's four quadrant model provides a foundation for the job analysis process:



Suddenlink has three main job families:

- Customer Service
- Technical Support
- Inbound Sales

From 2008 to 2010, Suddenlink continued to drive innovations in their operating model. As a result, the nature of the three jobs changed over time. Different performance metrics became more important to meeting financial goals.

When Suddenlink updated their job analyses for the three main job families in 2010, the competency profiles had changed compared to previous results. As an example, the chart below shows the difference from 2008 to 2010.

Technical Support Job Analysis Example	
2008	2010
Composure	Compliance
Probing	Composure
Integrity	Dependability
Stress Tolerance	Tact
Compliance	Learning Aptitude
Tact	Integrity

One of the key changes is that learning aptitude is now critical to successful performance in the Technical Support role. This led Suddenlink to consider amending the hiring process to include a problem-solving assessment to measure the candidate's ability to absorb and apply new information.

2. Build a data-driven hiring model

Many human resource organizations cannot quantify their hiring models with performance improvement. This has created challenges with receiving funding when these projects compete for financial resources against technology or operational projects.

Suddenlink has developed a hiring model that links candidate data with performance data. The goal is to understand when a candidate completes the selection process if they meet performance requirements. This data-driven approach allows them to quantify their hiring model which is based on job performance.

For example, by taking a data-driven approach, Suddenlink was able to quantify the following performance linkages:

Individuals with higher assessment scores compared to individuals with lower assessment scores had the following performance improvement:

- Attendance – **29%** improvement
- Sales – **44%** improvement
- Quality – **20%** improvement

In addition, the use of a data-driven model enables Suddenlink's hiring managers to make a more informed hiring decision. Each job family has a specific hiring profile

based on the job competencies, discussed above, and performance data. When job candidates complete the selection process, Suddenlink can automatically match the job candidates to multiple job models. The chart below highlights this capability.

Basic Information		Results	Workflow Steps	Custom Modules	Emails	Notes/Documents
Result Details		Job Report				
JOB PROFILE	COGNITIVE	PERSONALITY	SIMULATION	OVERALL		
US Customer	✓	✗	✓	✗		
US Sales	✓	✓	✓	✓		
US Tech Support	✗	✗	✓	✗		

3.Create alignment around hiring

The first two strategies discussed rely on data-driven approaches to carefully define the job in specific, measurable competencies and then link the hiring process to performance data for a closed-loop model based on performance. The next strategy involves gaining alignment between HR/Recruiting, Training, and Operations around the job, hiring process, and retention strategies. When these functional areas have different objectives or understanding of the contact center job, the hiring model will be broken and ineffective.



One effective tactic is to take the job analysis results and use them to facilitate a discussion between Human Resources, Training, and Operations so that everyone can understand the job model and the organization has alignment around the hiring process and goals.

Summary

Creating a fact-based, data-driven hiring model can enable contact center organizations to reduce turnover and improve job performance because they have a clear understanding of the job, how candidates fit the job, and how their hiring process improves the overall business.

Suddenlink uses three strategies to define their hiring process:

1. Clearly define and understand the job competencies using a data-driven job analysis process.
2. Validate that the hiring process actually predicts job performance by linking candidate assessment scores to Suddenlink performance metrics.
3. Align HR, Training, and Operations so that everyone understands the job model and hiring process.

About FurstPerson, Inc.

Based in Chicago, IL, FurstPerson provides web-based pre-employment selection solutions supported by a professional services team that enables customer contact organizations to:

- Define job profiles
- Select web-based assessments based on these job profiles
- Match candidates to the job profiles
- Conduct ongoing business analysis to drive performance improvement
- Drive business results including:
 - Improved new hire retention by up to 70%
 - Improved new hire performance by up to 45%
 - Reduced time and cost through hiring automation
 - Improved time to hire
 - Return on investment ranging from \$8 to \$15 for each \$1 invested with FurstPerson

FurstPerson has over 15 years experience developing and publishing testing content for customer contact organizations. FurstPerson is active in over 1,000 locations and has solutions available in English, Spanish, and French-Canadian.

Learn more by visiting furstperson.com or calling us at 888-626-3412.

About Barbara Morrison

Barbara Morrison is Human Resources Director, Texoma Region, **Suddenlink Communications**.

Barbara has 20 plus years HR experience, 12 years with call centers which includes two fortune 50 companies. Barbara has a BA in Communications and Master's Degree in HR management. Suddenlink Communications has scored most improved in customer satisfaction two years in a row. Suddenlink of Tyler Texas has been nominated for Employer of the Year by the Texas Workforce commission, primarily due to employee selection process initiatives including experiential selection processes.

About Jeff Furst

Jeff Furst is the President and CEO of **FurstPerson, Inc.**