CASE STUDY: OLEAN WHOLESALE GROCERY CO-OP INC.

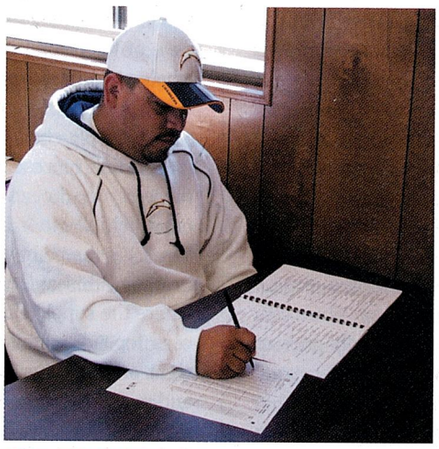
Wanted: A Quality Employee

Pre-employment assessment helps employers identify the best workers. *By Robert Barrese*

As today's market spurs more job seekers, weeding through the growing pool of candidates for the model employee can seem like finding a needle in a haystack.

Success for Olean Wholesale Grocery Co-op Inc., Olean, NY, depends on its 250 warehouse and office personnel. Operating 24 hours a day, six days a week, Olean's 350,000-square-foot distribution center serves 145 grocery stores in New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

At Olean, the hiring process is multifaceted. It includes a face-to-face interview, drug testing, background check and an assessment/evaluation questionnaire provided by Select Inc., a Vancouver, WA, human resources test development and consulting firm.



SELF-EVALUATION: Job applicants at Olean Wholesale Grocers are prescreened based on their answers to a professional assessment.

Its assessment/evaluation questionnaire, called Select Advantage, is a pre-employment test designed to predict an applicant's performance on the job. Questionnaires are tailored to individual positions, such as order selector, warehouse supervisor, delivery driver or transportation supervisor.

Mike Redden, director of warehousing for Olean , personally interviews 50-75 applicants a year. "Prior to considering someone for employment, I ask them to do a pre-employment screening and a background check," he says. "The last component is the Select Inc. testing. I use it as a tool to verify how the interview went."

Select Advantage determines who has the right mix of work sense, values and habits to excel at the job in question. Questionnaires consist of three parts: "work interest and willingness compatibility," "self-description" and "work-related judgment."

"Work interest and willingness compatibility" lists working conditions that an applicant must accept to be compatible for the job. For example, applicants are asked if they are willing to work weekends and holidays. Another question asks if they are "able to work with little or no supervision; able to work independent of others; do the things that need to be done without being told." The multiple choice answers for these questions consist of: a. would enjoy; b. willing; and c. not willing.

The "self-description" assessment presents two statements and asks applicants which statement best describes themselves. An example would be "Are you observant or do you have the desire to satisfy a customer? Choose which one best describes you."

"You want someone to be observant, but more importantly you want that person to be able to satisfy a customer," Redden explains.

"Work-related judgment" presents a list of situations that an applicant for an order selector's post should be able to handle. An example includes: "You received an order from a customer that seemed unusually large in quantity for that customer. This customer usually does not order that much of an item. You should: a. select the item, it must be correct if it is on the order.; b. do not select that item and let the customer re-order the correct amount; c. notify your boss; d. ask a co-worker to see if they have picked this type of quantity for the customer; e. notify your boss of the quantity in question for the order so it can be checked.

"This selection would give the employer insight into whether these individuals had any past experience in this environment without having to train them to make those judgments," Redden says.

Once the Select Advantage assessment is completed, answers to the questionnaires are faxed to Select Inc. for grading. The results are ranked on a bell curve, compared to answers given by applicants of the same job across the country.

"I basically take all of these results of the interview process of which Select Inc. is a component and make an educated decision if this is someone I want to hire at Olean Wholesale," Redden says.

Redden says he had used a pre-employment assessment sponsored by another company in the past but switched to Select Inc. because the questions are more customized for the individual job positions.

Redden adds that Select Inc. was also more price-competitive; their tests start at $15 each. "The investment is certainly worth it. It gives me an opportunity to choose better people. It has given me a better quality employee out of the chute that may not take as long to train," Redden adds.