

# The best kept secret

*Being in the wrong job can impact heavily on both the individual and the organisation. talentsmoothie director Sally Bibb discusses why strengths-based recruitment is the best approach for everyone*

**D**espite the huge amount of effort organisations make to attract and hire the right people there are a surprising number who are square pegs in round holes. How many times have you been into a store and been served by someone who is just not that interested? Contrast that experience with being served by someone who is hugely engaged and clearly loves what they do. It makes a huge difference doesn't it?

## Finders keepers

Being in the wrong job can be soul destroying for the individual. For the company they are working for it means lower than necessary productivity, lower engagement and ultimately success. So how do organisations find and keep employees who are in their element doing their job? The simple answer is to hire people on the basis of their strengths (what they are really good at and love to do) as well as competencies (what they can do). Most companies hire on competencies alone. The



**“Research shows that people who play to their strengths in their work are highly engaged, happier and more confident”**  
Sally Bibb,  
director, talentsmoothie

problem with that is that just because someone can do something doesn't mean that they really want to do it. So hiring on competencies never produces consistently high performance. When people love what they do they perform better, have more energy for their work, are more engaged and stay longer.

## A proven success

Hiring on strengths makes sense and has been proven to be successful. Yet most organisations haven't embraced it yet. Only the really forward thinking ones see the benefits. The financial sector is probably ahead of the pack – Standard Chartered Bank, Aviva and Norwich Union have all been using strength-based approaches to recruitment for several years.

Few companies in the retail and service sectors have adopted a strength-based approach to recruitment. Yet the benefits are clear in this sector because employees have such a direct and immediate impact on customers.

McDonald's is a notable exception.

It has embraced the approach and tests “what candidates do naturally”, such as whether they have a natural preference for working with customers.

talentsmoothie is currently working with top companies such as Starbucks to introduce a strengths-based approach to recruitment. Starbucks makes a clear link between employees who love their jobs and customer satisfaction. It has identified the strengths and motivators of its best baristas – the goal being to understand the formula so it can recruit more of the best.

Starbucks already has a great reputation as a ‘people’ company. This will help to enhance it further because talking to people about its strengths at interview is very motivational as you are asking the company what it is great at. And if the recruit’s strengths don’t meet the needs of the job, it is easy for them to understand why, yet still feel good about themselves. They can become great ambassadors for the company too because the selection process feels very positive and they walk away understanding why that job is not for them instead of feeling rejected.

### **Talent spotting**

Companies that embrace the strengths-based approach are able to hire from new talent pools that they previously did not tap into because they did not know that they had the required strengths. In sectors that compete hard for talent, finding new and fresh sources of great people can be a real competitive advantage.

The proven benefits of hiring on strengths are compelling from reduction in staff turnover to an increase in productivity and positive feedback from candidates as well as opening up new talent pools and increasing diversity of applicants and recruits.

### **Out with the old?**

Hiring people on their strengths as well as their competencies does not mean throwing out your current approach – it simply means adding an extra piece. It is like turbo boosting what you already do to make it work harder for you.

And it doesn’t mean it will cost more either. There is evidence that cost per hire reduces because there is less wastage at each stage of the process as you de-select unsuitable people much earlier and more easily.

It is not just the organisation that benefits from the strengths-based approach. The employee does too. The research shows that people who play to their strengths in their work are highly engaged, happier and more confident, they have higher levels of energy and vitality, experience less stress, are more resilient, are more likely to achieve their goals, are more effective at developing themselves and growing as individuals and the teams they work in are more effective.

And of course, the other major benefit is that relatively few organisations use strengths-based recruitment yet, which means that those who do have a real edge over their competitors.