



Oops! The Worst Way to Find the Right Person for the Job **By Kathy Kolbe**

If you were told your next major investment had a one-in-ten chance of succeeding, as a good business executive, you'd pass.

If you were offered four-in-ten odds for a capital outlay, you wouldn't bite.

And yet, those are exactly the odds for success you're playing when you use the traditional ways of hiring people.

Job interviews — touted by experts as your best clue for success, and an expensive selection process to boot — hit the mark only one in ten* times, business studies show.

Intelligence tests — used for decades as the sole determining factor of who was “smart enough for the job” — are valid measures of job success only four times out of ten*, according to studies on personnel performance.

Amazingly, businesses cling to those bad-odds systems, even knowing they don't work. Many feel like the career advisor who told me, “Regardless of what we say, finding the right career fit is mostly a matter of luck.”

He's right, if you rely solely on résumés and job interviews.

But he's dead wrong if you consider the other factor that will give you the kind of odds any executive would grab: eight out of ten* times, you'll get the right person for the right job if you hire based on natural instincts.

Human instincts are the most misunderstood and undervalued part of our natural abilities. They've been left out in the woodshed because science and psychology couldn't figure out how to measure them — the bottom line for science to validate any concept. But science did figure out how to measure intelligence, how to measure skill levels, how to measure what we've learned. What's even more crucial, though, is how we act, what we will do, what we won't do. The deciding factor in fitting a talented person with the right job is their natural instinctive makeup — their “mental fingerprint.”

I've spent more than 30 years studying human instincts, inspired by my father's pioneering work in human intelligence. E.F. Wonderlic originated the field of employee testing in the 1930s with his Wonderlic Personnel Test. By the time the United States entered World War II, the federal government had nationalized my dad's test and used it to determine who would be foot soldiers and who would be trained as officers. For 30 years, it was hard to get a decent job in this country if you didn't score well on the Wonderlic.

Then in the late 1960s, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it was unconstitutional for a company to base employment on the Wonderlic or any test that had a “hidden headwind” against women and minorities. I well remember the devastation of knowing my father’s work had been misused. And I also remember our long conversations about how intelligence wasn’t everything. “But,” he told me, “We don’t know how to measure the other factors. Maybe that will be your job.”

I’ve made it my job. Without advanced degrees or a single university grant, I’ve conducted research on every continent. I developed a simple instrument to measure instinct and have tested it on over 500,000 people in many career paths — from business and industry giants to hourly employees.

I first developed my test based on observations of gifted children, who were the focus of my **first** business, which wrote and published educational material for the gifted. These “smart, creative” kids didn’t respond the same way. Some would study an issue to death, others would insist on creating a system, some would wing it, some would build a model.

As I studied the scientific and psychological literature on human reactions, two things struck me. First was that as far back as Plato and Aristotle, there are musings about an inner striving force — a force described by the little-known word “conation.” Unlike cognition — or what we know — these ancient philosophers surmised there was also conation — or how we act. But when they were unable to isolate it into a measurable form, they abandoned the idea. Later, science would totally debunk the idea of human instinct, relying instead on the “higher” power of reason and insisting that it was man’s reason that separated him from the instinct-driven animal.

I didn’t buy it. I knew I not only chose to approach a problem in a certain way, but also was driven to act that way. I knew the success of following my gut instincts and I knew the failure of denying them. I knew what it felt like to be forced to “work against my grain” and I knew the unlimited energy I had to do a job when I was in synch with it.

My research into conation now includes wide-ranging data from large corporations, small businesses, universities, high schools and entire communities.

I have found there are four “Striving Instincts” that govern behavior. We’re born with these instincts. They stay consistent over our lifetimes, regardless of education or training. They’re equally distributed between men and women, among all the races. They are, actually, the one way we’re all created equal.

While we all have talents in each of the four instincts, I’ve found that usually our “insistent talent” — the way we will act — is most focused in one or two, while our “resistant talent” — the way we won’t act — is usually strongest in one instinct.

The Striving Instincts are...

- **Fact Finder:** the instinct to probe, investigate, study. It is a given that a person insistent in Fact Finder will never have enough information while a person resistant in Fact Finder couldn’t care less about the data.
- **Follow Thru:** the instinct to pattern, sequence, develop a system. It is a given that a person who is insistent in Follow Thru must find closure to a project while one resistant in Follow Thru can’t stand structure.
- **Quick Start:** the instinct to innovate, take chances, verbally sell an idea. It is a given that a person who is insistent in Quick Start will experiment while one resistant in Quick Start wants predictability.

- Implementor: the instinct to build, to mold, to demand quality. It is a given that a person who is insistent in Implementor will tinker while one resistant in Implementor is a klutz.

You need a hot salesperson whose verbal dynamics will wow the client on a new product you've developed. The last person you'd want is the guy who built your prototype: he's likely insistent in Implementor and doesn't communicate with words but with three-dimensional models. Nor would you want a person initiating in Fact Finder who would bore the client to death with every detail about the product and its historical background. Your Follow Thru project manager, who is crackerjack at keeping everything on schedule and never leaves a stone upturned, will never volunteer for the selling task because she's not good on her feet. You need a person insistent in Quick Start who can sell what she could never develop, build, or get to market.

The problem is that American business has convinced itself, with the help of the business gurus, that any smart person can be trained to do any job. That if smart people just "change," just develop better work habits, just learn how to communicate, all will be fine.

That just isn't true.

It's not that we're dealing with dumb people. Take it for granted that your staff has the mental smarts to do a job. But forcing them to do it in a way that is alien to their instinctive talents is a lunge toward disaster.

You wouldn't want a person insistent in Quick Start running a nuclear power plant. Given a crisis, she'll react imaginatively, just at the moment you really need a person insistent in Follow Thru who will go by the book so all the safeguards are put into play.

You wouldn't want a person insistent in Fact Finder building your summer retreat, even though that person will undoubtedly collect information on every available floor plan, elevation schemes, and even the best furniture to outfit the place. What you want is a person insistent in Implementor whose natural talents at construction will give you a quality finished product.

You wouldn't want a person insistent in Follow Thru to lead your creative team. While this person can make sure the needed systems are created and the schedule is met, he's not the one to bring forth the new ideas.

Yet, I've found business makes those kinds of mistakes every day.

The same men who can so clearly understand that their favorite basketball team wins only when they "play their game," can't see the same is true in their own offices. The same women who justify a decision because "it feels right in my gut," can't see they're not the only ones who need to rely on instincts.

- American Express of Mexico bases all its hiring on the instinctive approach.
- Eastman Chemical Company used my approach to build teams for its global communication project that tied together its 14 manufacturing plants in three countries, its sales operations in 29 countries, and its 18,000 employees.
- Alaska Airlines uses Kolbe in its leadership training, hiring, communication, and team building.
- The American Management Association works with Kolbe for its Change Management practice.
- IBM is now involved with Kolbe as a Change Management resource and team building strategist.
- The Strategic Coach uses and recommends Kolbe to every one of its clients.

There's been such an acceptance of my system for a simple reason. It works.

A few years ago, I conducted a seminar for about 100 business leaders from throughout the United States, Mexico, Spain, and South Africa. Many of these executives are business competitors. All of them are using my system in one way or another. They'd come together to be updated on my research and applications for using instinct.

As part of our three-day seminar, I asked selected executives to discuss their particular problems or needs with the audience. One of America's leading businessmen had come prepared with transparencies and charts illustrating his problem. His international firm was committed to a gigantic project that would take five years to develop and billions to implement. There were six major teams of employees who had split up the necessary tasks — each team having at least one Ph.D. and members considered experts in their fields.

I had been working with this firm for several years and had already tested all of the people involved in this project. (Instinct results are quantified on a 1-10 scale, so a person's MO — their modus operandi — is expressed in four numbers that show their results in each of the instincts.)

The executive displayed the first chart, which showed the makeup of the teams, with the individual employees identified only by their MOs. He explained the basic task assigned to each team.

“Which of these teams is six months behind in its work?” he asked the gathering. “And which one is so far ahead of schedule, it's helping everyone else out?”

Within two minutes, the audience of business leaders was shouting out the answers.

What they saw on that chart was that a team charged with jump-starting every phase of the process was being led by a person who was insistent in Fact Finder, who naturally would need all the details before making a decision. The person was also resistant in Quick Start and resisted change. It was very clear why this team was six months behind schedule and would never catch up. The team that was so far ahead was led by a person insistent in Quick Start, a person who thrived on the constant changing demands of her team.

There was no consideration of firing the person insistent in Fact Finder. This guy was a valuable asset to the company — he just was trying to do the wrong job. The audience suggested he be reassigned into an appropriate job where he could use his natural talents to be sure the company didn't overlook any of the information it needed to make the project a success.

I had a lot at stake in seeing that this company carried off their mega project. My business depends on clients trusting our judgment. It depends on them believing enough in the power of instincts that they'll “go out on a limb,” choosing someone they overlooked until the MO showed they were right for the job. And it depends on my recommendations hitting the mark.

At Kolbe, we keep detailed records of our success rate. We get a successful match when hiring for a position eight out of ten* times.

Those are the kind of odds that take hiring — the expensive, time-consuming, and crucial job of hiring — out of the realm of a crapshoot.

*Source: John E. Hunter and Ronda F. Hunter, "Validity and Utility of Alternative Predictors of Job Performance," Psychological Bulletin 96, no.1 (1984): 90, reporting correlation statistics for various selection criteria's ability to predict successful job performance.

**From meta analysis performed by Dr. Ryan Thomas, President, College of Eastern Utah, of four cross-industry studies conducted by Kolbe Corp correlating job performance with job fit predictions using Kolbe Corp's selection technology.