

STRATEGIES

Emotional Intelligence for High-Stakes Hiring

By screening candidates for empathy and adaptability, this school gets better-fitting hires.



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Recruitment can be a mysterious process, particularly when you're hiring teachers. There's no set formula for a successful hire. Traditionally, you would spend two hours with a person who you hoped would be a good and lasting fit. Today, that's not enough information for either party to make a smart assessment of fit. When I joined Charlotte Latin School in 2014, Headmaster Arch Macintosh had a real interest in improving the hiring process. He had been to a conference on emotional intelligence (EI) — defined by Psychology Today as “the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others” — and encouraged me to become certified in EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory), an assessment tool that helps organizations evaluate individuals' EI and use that information to predict their success working together over the long term.

I trained with Korrel Kanoy of Developmental Associates, a consulting firm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Certification consisted of a three-day workshop training participants to administer and interpret assessments, facilitate team development and other related topics.

During the hiring process at Charlotte Latin, we utilize EQ-i in activities such as role-playing, structured interviews and presentations. For example, we ask a teacher candidate to do a teaching demonstration, and a candidate for a leadership position to make a presentation on their subject area. To assess candidates' performance, interviewers and observers use rating sheets anchored in emotional intelligence concepts, including accuracy of content as well as depth and breadth of knowledge. We are also looking for flexibility — ability to adapt and make adjustments. How do they answer an unexpected question or handle a technology glitch? Empathy is important at Latin. Did the candidate scan the audience for feedback? Did she or he listen to comments without interrupting? Did she reflect on the comments?

Candidates also get a campus tour and have lunch with students, teachers or administrators depending on the role for which they are interviewing.

Finally, we give an EQ-i online assessment: 100 questions based on EI criteria.

Following the interview and the candidate's online assessment, we evaluate the individual and the EQ-i assessment results to get a full picture. We also consider feedback from the candidate's campus visit. We want a good fit for both parties. While we still look at “traditional” hiring criteria like experience and expertise, we consider EI one of the strongest indicators guiding our decision.

Last year, we began surveying candidates for feedback: one survey for those hired and one for those not hired. Both groups provided ideas for improving the process to give candidates more time to understand Latin's values and who we are as a community. We've learned that the structured campus visit is a very busy day, so we have built downtime into the day to give applicants a better on-campus experience.

Both groups thought the online application — separate from the EI assessment — was long, and we are looking at ways to shorten it. Some wanted more communication during the hiring process, and more time to prepare for their demonstration. We also asked which part of the interview day helped them learn the most about our school. Those not hired said the teaching demonstration and phone interview. Those hired said the lunch meeting, department meetings and campus tour.

How has this helped Charlotte Latin? Since I have been at the school, we have used EI on more than 60 hires, with only two hires not staying longer than a year due to fit. Given that hundreds of candidates interview on campus every year, the success of our program is significant. Latin faculty members typically stay 15 or more years. Continuing to find good candidate/employee matches is a priority. Hiring in a preK-12 school is much more complicated than hiring someone with clearly defined skillset such as accounting. We are hiring people who will shape the lives of children. The stakes are high, and we need to get it right the first time. **N**

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