

# "You Are What You Write"

At one time, it was easy to hire the right employee. An employer could ask a few dozen embarrassingly personal questions, and as the candidate sat squirming across a desk fielding piercing stares, the interviewer would ultimately make an important hiring decision based entirely on gut instinct. Thus would begin a long and fruitful relationship that would often end with a gold watch.

Today, hiring has become a more complex and restrictive ritual. In most states, the Courts have determined that a would-be employee has many more rights than the employer, and the only reason the employer has any rights at all, rests on the fragile premise that he owns the company.

A candidate's past behavior, we're now told, cannot influence an employer's hiring decision either, and certain once common background questions are now off limits, for instance: "Where did you work before? Do you have dreams about injuring coworkers? Or have you ever been charged with defacing a national monument?"

As a general rule, it is considered an invasion of privacy to ask any question which would require the candidate to provide an answer.

Surprisingly, a number of firms have turned to the science of handwriting analysis, touted by its proponents as a nearly infallible predictor of an applicants character, intelligence, and aptitude and a way to tell if a candidate will steal office supplies or take hostages should the laser printer go haywire.

Experts tell us that embedded in our loops, letter slant and spacing of words is the secret of personality, and the hand, as an unwitting agent of brain, will not lie. Writing is the emotional tattletale flushing out a psychopath, for instance, because he dotted his i's the same way Charles Manson did, which in Manson's case, was a real dot tattooed on his forehead right above his eye.

But why handwriting, since so few of us write longhand anymore. Almost everything we do now relies on a computer keyboard instead, except for scribbling on those yellow sticky notes which routinely fall off the things you initially stuck them to. Generally I find one when I get home, clinging to the bottom of my shoe, and it's usually a reminder to find someone to fix my keyboard.

Knowing my own handwritings, and how indecipherable it is, I fear that I will someday be unemployable, or even worse, discover some hidden personality quirk previously unknown to me. I fear I'll learn I have not fulfilled my full human potential, and the analysis will tell me and that I would be better served as an elderly woman who raises whippets.

Although I remain skeptical, I suppose there is a benefit to handwriting analysis, since it will initially screen out anyone who cannot operate a pencil. But I can't help thinking, as I buckle into a 737, that one of the reasons my pilot was hired was because he made really nice "R's"

If you're an employer bent on decoding an applicant's penmanship, I suggest finding a credentialed analyst whose name is followed by Ph.D. or a degree in clinical psychology. Be skeptical of anyone who works for the Psychic Friends Network.

And no matter how the test results come out---Don't hire anyone who walks off with your pen.

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