Reinventing the Hiring Process at Aspen Dental
A Case Study on Automation, Candidate Experience and Predictive Science

Aspen Dental, one of the nation’s top dental care providers, began as a small company in Syracuse, NY in 1964. By 2011, Aspen had expanded to more than 21 states, serving over 1.5 million patients. However, managing their 250 offices was nothing short of a challenge, especially for it’s Office Managers.

The challenge was this: identify the competencies that would lead to hiring only the best candidates while reducing the already high turnover rate and keeping it lower during an expansion phase. In addition, Aspen needed to ensure that all new hires were capable of meeting and exceeding the business goals established for each position.

CHALLENGES

Many New Hires Due to Rapid Expansion

Aspen Dental, one of the largest and fastest growing chains of dental offices in the country, was adding more than 55 locations per year. Sue Decker, vice president human resources, knew they were going to need a system to keep up with the hiring demands created by that kind of growth.

Decentralized Hiring Process

“Our homegrown resume database wasn’t enough anymore, and our hiring process was challenged, because what we were actually doing was forcing our managers to become recruiters,” she said. “We were making assumptions about their skill levels, and as it turns out, recruiting is not something that comes naturally to everyone.”

In April 2009, Aspen began working with web-based business solutions provider iCIMS. With a reliable hiring process now in place, Decker

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VP HR
Aspen Dental
had confidence that Aspen was getting the right people who wanted to work with them.

**Need to Hire Based on Performance Expectations and Fit**

“Now we needed to fix the next piece of our puzzle,” Decker said, “which was performance expectations and candidate fit. We needed to start working on determining core competencies and models for the people we were hiring.”

**Turnover Rate Was Too High**

Of course hiring the wrong people up front leads to higher turnover. “Performance expectations weren’t set for new people, and we had not clearly defined what those core competencies were for each of the positions we were hiring for.”

“Aspen office managers are the key to offices running smoothly and successfully,” Decker said. “They need to really be there to support everybody else,” so the medical professionals can focus on providing excellent care for their patients. However, the turnover rate for office managers was high.

Aspen had been working with Caliper (another pre-employment testing company) for about five years, using their tools to assess office manager candidates. Considering the importance of this role, Decker wanted to see how Chequed.com’s system might be different from what they were using with the Caliper profile, and if any improvement in turnover or performance may be possible.

**SOLUTION**

**Linking Candidate Fit to Business Case**

Decker says that they learned, after meeting with Chequed.com, how the company could link each core competency to the business results they sought. Doing surveys and profiles of candidates kick-started the process, but Chequed also did surveys and profiles for each incumbent
enrolled to provide perspective on competencies that were already proven effective.

“Certainly developing a benchmark on people is great,” Decker says, “but Chequed.com takes that next step. We provided our team metrics and financial performance and overall performance satisfaction to the folks at Chequed.com, who then did a correlation between the scoring and the business case.”

**Identifying Candidate Competencies That Create Success**

“I think one of the things that opened our eyes the most was that the office manager competencies that we believed were most important—and that we were gauging the Caliper program scores on—were not, in reality, the core competencies of the folks who were most successful,” Decker explained.

Chequed’s predictive science platform allowed Aspen to accurately identify those competencies, or sets of behaviors, that led to success. Designed in partnership with the Department of Psychology at the State University of New York at Albany, Chequed.com’s tools are developed on a foundation of behavioral science to better predict candidate performance.

**Streamlining the Hiring Process**

Hiring managers received the results of candidate assessments immediately, allowing them to remove low potential candidates from the pool and focus their attention on high potential talent. They were able to quickly move the right candidate through the process.

Hiring managers also received individualized interview questions to foster a more structured and job relevant interview. These helped with the interview and with the interpretation of candidate responses. This made for a “very-easy-to-follow tool — almost a checklist that speaks to each one of the behavioral interviewing questions that are presented with the profile.”

“An executive summary explaining nature and degree of fit or non-fit to the role is another key tool and saves hiring managers time,” Decker said. “They don’t have to interpret a series of check marks; they get a
narrative that says, ‘yes, this person has high potential,’ which helps a non-recruiter hiring manager think about why a candidate would be successful in the role and not just hire them because they have four or five check marks.”

**Automated and Predictive Reference Check Process**

With ChequedReference™, Aspen was able to further streamline the hiring process. Candidates provided references via the portal and hiring managers were able to generate requests with just a click.

But ChequedReference™ was more than a time-saver. It was also a key component of the assessment. It actually delivered an assessment of the references provided by the candidates. Aspen immediately got a score of how a reference thought the candidate would fit the job and Aspen’s culture.

The reference check was done completely online, and in a job-relevant, structured way, with the same basis in behavioral science as with ChequedFit™ to provide incremental predictability.

**RESULTS**

Working with Chequed.com and iCIMS, Aspen Dental has dramatically expanded their candidate pool, and hiring managers are getting the cream of the crop. In other words, Aspen spends less time to get better hires.

So far, Chequed.com’s ChequedFit™ and ChequedReference™ products, have enabled Aspen to reduce turnover rates by 47% and hiring time by 75%.

As Sue Decker said, “we’re much more convinced today than we were a year ago that when our hiring managers are using this tool, they’re actually able, on their own, to hire the best candidate for each role.”

Let’s look at some of the results of the engagement to date:

- 60% increase in applicants. Applicant flow from 70,000+ per year to 28,000+ per quarter.
• 2- to 3-month hiring process reduced to 2 to 3 weeks.

• 50% turnover reduction in key positions; 47% lower turnover rate among hires that scored 3.5 cheques or higher; 10% reduction in turnover among office managers.

• Candidate experience improved: enabled easy management of 86,000 applicants.

• Only best applicants moved forward.

• Decentralized hiring done with consistent criteria.

By adding rigor and discipline to Aspen’s screening process, Chequed.com has been able to provide structure and control to the decentralized hiring process in a high growth company.