

SSA's eTest the Smart Way to Hire the Best Facility Managers

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

Are you in need of a top-notch facility manager? Have you dealt with hiring people you thought were going to work out great but proved to be not-so-great? Do you sometimes wish there was a foolproof test that could steer you to the perfect candidate? As the cartoon character used to say, "There's no need to fear, Underdog is here!" In this case, substitute "eTest" for "Underdog."

Two years ago, Self Storage Association president Mike Scanlon approached Doug Griest, co-founder of the Atlanta-based Management Psychology Group, about coming up with a dependable way to test

person in the right job. SSA's eTest requires no setup or licensing fees, so administration is straightforward and easy to use. Each customized facility manager eTest is \$75.

"We spent one-and-a-half years working with focus groups in self storage talking about the facility manager job," Griest said. "We did tests with a large number of successful self storage businesses across the country. We spoke with experts in self storage, got field observations and even tested managers who were already successful. By the time we were finished with the test we felt confident that it would prove to be of immediate benefit to the industry."



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Doug Griest, Management Psychology Group

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"The very large operators have enough managers that they can create internal screening surveys. But eTest is giving the mid sized and smaller operators the ability to do the same thing, with better results," added Alyssa Quill of Investment Real Estate Management. "This is another example of how the SSA is helping us all improve and raise the bar in the industry. We will not hire managers without having them take the eTest moving forward. It's just not worth the risk."

Griest is pleased that the eTest has been so well received, if for no other reason than it confirms that Management Psychology Group was on the

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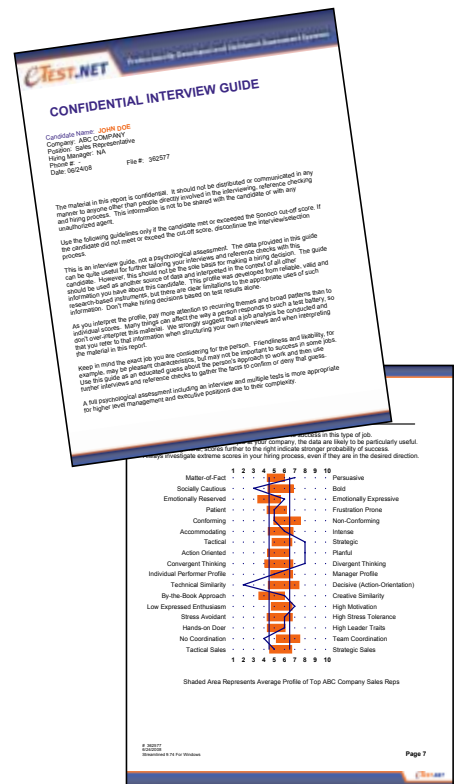
Already a Hit

The SSA "soft-launched" the eTest at the 2009 SSA Conference and Trade Show in Las Vegas and impressed those on hand. A growing number of companies now regularly use the eTest—and the reviews are positive.

"We have utilized personality profile services for many years, and we had come to trust those indicators generally. However, eTest provides focused analysis for our industry at an attractive price point," said Tom Maxfield of Watson & Taylor. "Facility managers are the 'tip of the spear' in our industry, and if an operator is willing to pay \$100 on average to acquire a new storage customer, then why would we not be willing to pay \$75 for an analysis to hire the right facility manager? It is a mandatory step in our hiring process, and it

prospective facility managers. The idea was to create a test that covered all the bases—personality, drive, leadership—and give self storage companies a tool that would lead to the best possible hire. Thus was born eTest.

In essence, eTest is a web-based screening program that provides self storage owner/operators and hiring managers with real-time pre-employment testing and assessment services. The tests have been specially customized for evaluating potential self storage facility managers. The SSA eTest provides a quick and cost-effective means of measuring common-sense traits linked to job behavior. Better hires result in reduced turnover and improved productivity by putting the right



right path all along in developing the test.

“We first started creating eTests for businesses back in 1997,” Griest said. “We collected data from 14,000 people in business. The idea all along was to help business people run more successful businesses. Improving the hiring process was at the center of it all.”

And what has Griest learned about the “perfect” self storage facility manager?

“Three things: They need to be relatively well organized, need to be people-oriented so they can relate effectively to customers and they should have a good sense of well being,” he said. “Self storage is a business that has a lot of quiet time that is punctuated with moments of being very busy, so a facility manager has to know how to fill his or her time effectively. And they need to know how to empathize with the customer as well.”

The Report

The eTest takes about 20-30 minutes and, best of all, the results are almost immediate. Results are sent real-time via e-mail to the owner/operator or hiring manager to be utilized for more focused and effective interviews. Feedback comes in the form of an interview guide that has a narrative description as well as actual scores presented in a good fit/bad fit scale.

“The look and feel of the report is clean, easy to read, and organized to provide an *interview* guide for the employer, a *developmental*



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Tom Maxfield, Watson & Taylor

guide for the candidate, and a *leadership* guide for both parties,” said Maxfield. “The profile has been very accurate in describing personality make-up, predicting actual behavior, and suggested remedial training and management techniques.

“The obvious differentiation is the *success profile* illustrating the prominent features of the candidate’s personality against the average profile of top SSA facility managers. The graph provides visual validation of the suitability of the candidate for the position against the statistical average—for the employer and the candidate—and it focuses or sharpens the interview or the development plan by determining how both parties can realize more effectiveness in the position.”

Quill agrees, and points out that IREM even used the test on its current employees to see how accurate it was.

“We asked a couple of our existing managers to take the test before we used it on new prospects,” she said. “We wanted to make sure the results were similar to the actual performance, strengths and weaknesses we’d seen out of those managers. They were spot on!”

“The results are clear to read and easy to understand,” Quill added. “My favorite part of the analysis is the quick chart at the end that allows us to see how the tester compares with

the top managers in the industry for several different categories. Quickly reviewing this chart lets me know if I should bother reading the entire report or not!”

Maxfield would even like to see the eTest expanded to include other aspects of self storage.

“We would like the eTest expanded to address additional positions, i.e., marketing, call center, assistant managers, etc.,” he said. “And, as the database grows, we would like to see periodic reports on developing trends, feedback, etc.”

And Quill thinks the SSA eTest can have a profound influence on the industry.

“I think that eTest has the potential to improve the quality of managers across the country,” she concluded. “It takes most of the risk out of the hiring process. Using eTest along with a solid interview process, background check, credit check, and drug test will help us all decrease turnover. Decreasing turnover will save the expenses associated with hiring and training from scratch, improve the overall ability and skill level of our managers, improve morale in our organizations, and most importantly, keep us focusing on increasing profits!”

“Our standards are higher these days—looking for managers that can market our properties, sell to close all leads, keep customer satisfaction high, and maintain a clean and bright new-generation store. Tools like eTest are helping us hire more managers from different industries, instead of focusing on candidates with prior self storage experience.”

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Alyssa Quill, Investment Real Estate Management