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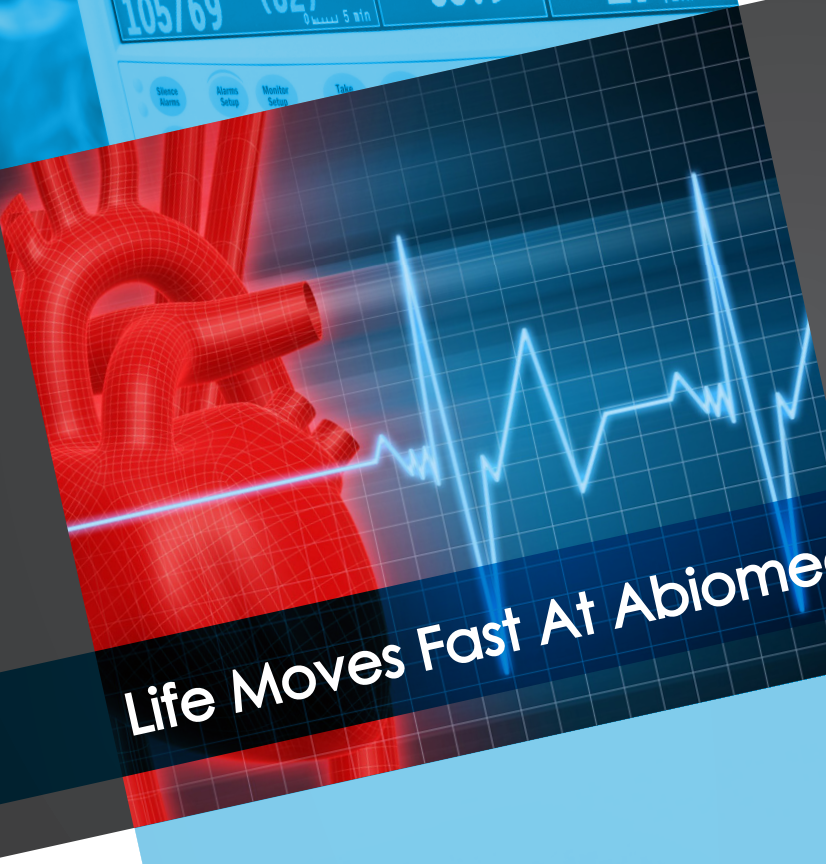

Profiles International®

CASE STUDY

Life Moves Fast At Abiomed; PXT Helps Hiring Efficiency

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ABIOMED®

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ProfileXT®

At Abiomed, Inc., science and medicine are the background melody for the thumping of a human heart. The fast-moving, cutting edge company makes devices that provide vital support for hearts in crisis.

At the company's Massachusetts headquarters, science and medicine intersect with day-to-day office life far removed from a clinical setting. Yet workers are still connected to life-saving medical practices.

Abiomed manufactures and clinically supports medical devices for the cardiac catheterization lab that take over the heart's work -- either entirely or partially -- when the organ is in distress. The devices offer circulatory support to keep the blood pumping when patients undergo high risk heart procedures or even when they have had a heart attack.

One of Abiomed's main devices is the Impella®, the world's smallest heart pump, an instrument that aids the heart in pumping blood when the organ is too weak to work on its own. Abiomed is a leading maker of several mechanical circulatory support devices that allow for a continuum of care in heart patients.

Founded in 1981 by a small group of scientists, the company has undergone a vast transformation in just a few years. The founders' goal was to produce the world's first implantable artificial heart, an end they eventually realized. Then Abiomed acquired Impella CardioSystems in 2005. With FDA approval of the Impella® cardiac device in 2008, the company changed from a small business to an entrepreneurial, action-oriented operation. Revenues grew from $40 million in 2009 to $125 million in 2012. The bulk of the business and the revenue come from the interventional cardiologist in the cath lab rather than the surgical suite.

The story of the entrepreneurial, fast-moving organization and its ground-breaking devices is still unfolding. Part of the tale involves the science of assessments and how Profiles International, an assessment leader, is helping the company hire employees that keep Abiomed business moving at a fast, efficient pace.

The Background

The heart implements that Abiomed manufactures and sells dictate a culture in which workers are dedicated and passionate about patient care. Abiomed devices work by offering minimally invasive, life-saving options in the cardiac catheterization lab, benefiting patients who previously had limited options.

Challenges

- Identifying candidates that possess critical success factors.
- A fast paced hiring process to fit a fast paced organization.
- Hiring individuals that can cope with the high demands of the positions.

Solution

- Abiomed Hiring Guide
- ProfileXT®

Results

- A quick, highly effective hiring process.

"Abiomed works with the sickest of the sick," notes Frank LeBlanc, Vice President of Human Resources. "No one volunteers for an Impella. The thing that keeps us going is passion for our patients and knowing there are things we can do to help them. When a doctor says 'This person would have died without Impella,' that's a ringing endorsement of our device and our technology and the hard work of our people."

The employees that Abiomed seeks relish the company's reputation and their own association with it. They like competition, do not shy away from hard work, and must possess an "always on-call" mentality, because patients don't often have heart problems between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Abiomed workers must also be accountable and able to deliver results in the field. Once hired, they undergo a rigorous training program. Managers interact frequently with employees.

The U.S. headquarters of the 400-employee Abiomed is in Danvers, Mass, but the final assembly for the heart devices is in Aachen, Germany. About 300 workers are involved in the development, engineering and manufacture of the Impella®. The remainder of Abiomed employees are field-based personnel working at cardiac catheterization labs throughout the United States.

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Abiomed & Profiles

LeBlanc arrived at Abiomed in 2006 after 11 years in human resources at AET Films, the largest North American manufacturer of plastic packaging for the snack food market. As an HR veteran, he is a longtime believer in pre-employment profiles and views recruitment and selection of employees as a data-gathering mission.

Abiomed was using Profiles International assessments prior to LeBlanc's arrival, and he decided to expand their use because the immediacy of the results fits Abiomed's culture; Profiles' online availability and speedy assessment outcomes offer a hiring advantage. Says LeBlanc: "We move fast and make fast decisions. We are competitive in the medical device sector. Waiting for results to be processed separately can really be a disadvantage in terms of the speed of hiring."

He approaches hiring "the way Columbo approached a case," referring to the famous television detective. "Everything is data -- from the job candidate's response to the initial outreach to the way they show up the first day on the job and beyond. Pre-employment tools increase our chances of making good hiring decisions, and we would be crazy not to take advantage of them."

A Hiring Guide Plus Assessments

A hiring guide is Abiomed's bible, and leaders are constantly tweaking it. The manual reveals the habits and skills of top performers and helps executives determine what they can do up front to ensure recruitment of more of those kinds of employees.

To describe the hiring guide, LeBlanc employs the imagery of a golf setup: An instructor once told him that if his setup was wrong, 95 percent of his shots were doomed from the start. That applies to hiring too, he says: "Ninety-five percent of our hires could be doomed if we don't know what we are set up to do and have agreement on what we are looking for in a candidate. The hiring guide says 'Here, definitively, is what we need in these roles.' "

Recruiting and hiring are complicated by the rarity of candidates who have both clinical acumen and the right behavioral characteristics, he adds. “One or the other is easy to find, but we are looking for the person who possesses critical behavior success factors.”

These Include:

- **Competitive spirit:** A person who likes the bar set high and displays a track record of sequential growth.
- **Mental toughness:** An ability to recover from adversity and critical feedback with no acceptance of failure.
- **Experience and comfort:** A person who can work with ease in the cath lab environment.
- **A relationship** with interventional cardiologists.
- **Manageability and a positive attitude:** A person who is always open to hearing from others how to do the job better, and keeps a positive attitude.
- **Personal attributes:** These include emotional maturity, style and overall charm.
- **Conviction:** A refusal to accept failure in anything.

Abiomed pairs its hiring guide with the ProfileXT®. The assessment helps recruiters find top field representatives, clinical consultants and associate Impella® specialists, and its main advantages include a confirmation of intellectual ability and two or three behavioral traits.

The PXT’s custom job fit feature “helps to objectively back up what you subjectively suspect,” LeBlanc says. “Unless you are mentally quick, you will not get through the training process.” Managers test job candidates constantly both before and after training, looking for mental sharpness and understanding of clinical data and trial conclusions.

Because field managers have seen the PXT at work, its use as a screening tool has become almost automatic at Abiomed. Bad experiences with job candidates who were hired despite showing a weak match to the PXT’s Job Match Pattern offer a lesson. When managers have such an experience and return to the PXT to find answers, they realize they should have predicted what was going to happen. “Using the Profile has become ingrained in the hiring process and well-accepted and adopted,” LeBlanc adds.

While PXT is mainly a hiring tool, LeBlanc sometimes works with Profiles to marry it with CheckPoint 360™. Such pairing might happen when a specific employee needs coaching to move up the career ladder. Self-development begins with self-insight, says LeBlanc, and the 360 assessment helps individuals gain insight because it lets them see themselves the way managers and colleagues view them. “We use it when we are working with a person who has a lot of potential to be promotable, but lacks a bit of insight into his own ability, how he is perceived by others.” The 360 tool, which might be used on a new manager on the path to developing his management style, allows him to see where he needs to focus to continue down the development path and refine certain areas.

The Future

When LeBlanc arrived at Abiomed, the organization was using the PXT only for sales and clinical positions. Now the company is in a period of rapid growth and adding workers, so LeBlanc tries to educate managers involved in hiring about the value of building a Profile for each role, and loading all PXT profiles into Abiomed’s hiring system.

PXT is now in use for customer service, finance, and training positions. “Our use of the assessments helps us increase the odds of making good decisions,” adds LeBlanc. “It provides us with guidance in the hiring process, and there are certain characteristics that, if they are absent, we know this person is going to be imploding.

“I wish it were a magic bullet and we never made a hiring mistake, but there are no 100 percent predictors.”

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