Can Handwriting Identify Better Employees?

Can a person's handwriting reveal their personality and aptitude for a job? That's what many handwriting experts, called graphologists, claim — and millions of people may be denied jobs because of this controversial practice.

Graphology is not the same thing as forensic handwriting analysis, which can be used in investigations to authenticate historical documents, for example, or determine whether a signature has been forged.

Instead, graphologists claim that they can determine many aspects of a person's personality and mental status from their handwriting. Words showing a forward slant reveals an outgoing personality, for example, while a backward slant indicates a shy, reserved person. Some even claim to diagnose medical conditions: people who write their descending letters (such as j, g, or y) with a break in them are said to have back problems.

Canadian psychologist Barry Beyerstein, author of The Write Stuff: Evaluations of Graphology, the Study of Handwriting Analysis, explains that "oddly, many who would sneer at astrology or palm reading still assume that, inasmuch as writing is a form of expressive behavior, our style of penmanship might reveal something about our psychological makeup…. because writing, aptitudes, and personality are all controlled by the brain, the suggestion that they could somehow be related does not seem inherently absurd."

Indeed, exactly this correlation is claimed. As The Complete Book of Fortune explains, "Each variation of movement is unconsciously directed by the brain, and it is because of this that the graphologist can judge the mental state of the writer. From certain signs one can judge willpower and intellect; the extent of the writer's emotions; his or her morals; and … profession." Thus, graphologists believe, a page or two of handwriting can distinguish between an accountant and a chef, a go-getter and a layabout, or a thief and an honest man.

Though the practice dates back to the 1800s, it is still used in many situations including employment. A recent BBC News report noted,

"In most of the world, the use of graphology in recruitment is marginal. But in France — despite an appreciable decline of writing in recent years thanks to computers — the technique is proving remarkably resilient. Reliable figures are hard to come by. Graphologists themselves say that between 50% and 75% of companies make some use of hand-writing analysis, even if it is only occasional. On the other hand, many French companies that do use graphology are reluctant to speak about it openly because the practice is not seen as sufficiently "modern" or "global." The last independent study was in 1991, and it found that a massive 91% of public and private organizations in France were then making use of handwriting analysis. If that was the case, then 50% today does not seem so far-fetched."

Furthermore, says professional head-hunter Geoffroy Desvignes, "I place 100 or so people every year in very senior international positions. If graphology didn't work, it would quickly become obvious, and I would lose my clients. But they keep coming back."

Superficially that makes sense: If handwriting analysis was not valid, then clients would complain and no one would use it, right?

Not so, according to Emory University psychologist Scott Lilienfeld, in his book 50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology: "The contents of handwritten application letters are chock-full of biographical information, some of which (like previous job history or a criminal record) can predict job performance. Second … graphologists usually see the scripts of only short-listed applicants. Most people in this pool are already qualified for the job."

Thus the fact that many or most applicants selected (in part) by graphologists will likely be good employees doesn't really mean much because the obvious bad apples didn't make it that far, and the rejected ones never had the chance to demonstrate whether they were better than the accepted ones.

The fact is that scientific tests have repeatedly failed to find any evidence that a person's handwriting reveals their personality traits, temperament or psychology. Some outgoing people write with large, looping letters, while others don't. Some brilliant people have immaculate handwriting, while others don't. People change careers — and sometimes even their personalities — but their handwriting stays the same. If graphology were valid, potential terrorists could be identified and tracked before they struck simply by reading a few lines of their writing.

Graphology is not the only pseudoscience used by employers around the world. In 2009, an Austrian insurance company sought applicants for jobs in sales and management, preferring those who were born under the astrological signs Capricorn, Taurus, Aquarius, Aries and Leo. In 2011, a Chinese company that also used astrology in its hiring practices sought Capricorns, Libras and Pisces, but not Scorpios or Virgos — who were often difficult to get along with — according to a spokeswoman.

To some people these hiring practices may seem like a bad joke, but qualified applicants might be turned away because of their potential employer's reliance on pseudoscience.

Complete article can be found at: http://www.seeker.com/can-handwriting-identify-better-employees-1767481434.html