

Dear Dee

I'm delighted to let you share with your prospective client my assessment of your assessment, and I suppose I'm in a particularly good position to do so because of the way I come to know about it. As you know, when I was doing an article for Fortune about the new organization man-the one that ended up being titled "Gray Flannel Suit, Moi?"-I went back to William H. Whyte's original classic, *The Organization Man*. I discovered that one thing that motivated him to write that book was the 1950s fashion for giving aptitude tests to prospective managers, and he included in the book a chapter on how to cheat on the tests.

Well, of course, that was too much fun to resist. Aptitude tests aren't the thing today, of course: it's psychological assessments. And so as you know I began collecting information on assessments, on the tests given, etc., interviewing people who design the tests and who use them, etc. I was interested in three questions: Are these useful to the people taking them? Are they useful to people using them to make hiring and promotion decisions? And are they accurate-is it possible to "cheat"?

And of course I came to you, to hear what you had to say about all three of these questions and to ask you if you'd put me through your assessment process so that I could see what one was like.

Well, Dee, as you know I still pull out the stuff you told me in your assessment. I also still pull out some of the stuff I prepared for you in the course of it. You also know that I sought your advice when I was interviewing for this job, getting your feedback as to whether you thought I could handle it and, in particular, using your insights and our conversations to learn what kinds of tasks aren't up my street that I should make sure I give to strong deputies-i.e. how I should construct the job so that I get the best out of me as well as the best out of the people working for me. It hasn't failed me yet. I also enjoyed the process. And I also always laugh when I recall the couple of ways I, as a good journalist, tested the tester, trying to "cheat," and how you caught me.

You'd be the first to agree with me that assessment isn't everything. But I, a reformed skeptic, would be the first to say that when it's done as well as you do it, it is a wonderful opportunity not only for the company involved but for the executive involved. Like any good test, it does more than examine: It teaches.

All best to you

Tom

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(Note Tom is now Executive Director, National Center of the Middle Market)