

Technical Affairs

Are GEDs and High School Diplomas the Same?

By Mike Aamodt, Associate Editor

If the title of this column sounds familiar, it is the title of one of the papers I was scheduled to present at the IPMAAC meeting in Baltimore. However as some of you know, I hurt my back the day before the conference and spent the next week on my back in bed – a situation probably a lot harder on my wife than it was on me (save the jokes). So, I thought I would take the space in this column to tell you what I would have said at the conference.

There were two reasons we conducted our study. At the IPMAAC meeting in New Orleans, I presented the results of a meta-analysis on the validity of education for law enforcement positions. An audience member asked if there was a difference between high school diplomas and GEDs and I responded that I couldn't answer that on the basis of our data at that time. A few months later, we were working with a client who was having difficulty recruiting and retaining employees. Although they had a requirement that applicants have a high school diploma, they often ignored this rule and were wondering if they should drop the degree requirement as a way to expand their applicant pool. So, we thought it would be a good idea to investigate performance differences between employees with high school diploma and those with either a GED or no degree at all.

Perhaps a little background on the GED would be helpful. The General Education Development (GED) program was developed for the army during World War II to help qualify soldiers for the GI Bill. Over 750,000 people take the GED each year with about 70% passing. The five subject areas covered by the GED are reading, writing, math, science, and social science. Research on the GED has found that people with GEDs:

- Have higher cognitive ability than dropouts but lower than high school grads
- Are more likely to be employed than dropouts but less likely than high school grads
- Make 8% more money than dropouts but 12% lower than high school grads
- Earn lower grades in 4-year colleges and are less likely to complete college than high school grads

To determine the equivalence of high school diplomas and GEDs in terms of employee performance, we compared the performance of employees with no degree, a GED, and a high school diploma across three samples: warehouse employees, machine operators, and police officers (data from 9 studies).

The results of our analysis indicated that:

- There were no differences in performance ratings among the three degree types
- Employees with a GED quit their jobs sooner than employees with a high school diploma ($d = .23$, $n = 171$) and employees who dropped out of school ($d = .41$, $n = 97$)
- Employees with a GED were more likely to be fired than employees with a high school diploma ($d = .30$, $n = 175$)
- Employees with a GED had more disciplinary problems than did employees with a high school diploma ($d = .36$, $n = 103$) and employees who dropped out of school ($d = .31$, $n = 61$)

Where does this leave us? In need of more research. That high school graduates appear to be better employees than people with GEDs is not surprising. However, we did not expect that people with GEDs would have more discipline problems and lower tenure than employees who were high school dropouts. Further research is necessary to generalize what we found and to look at such issues as where the GED was earned (i.e., military, prison, home study) and the age of the employees when they earned their degree. If you have data on this topic, it is an excellent area for exploration. If you have data but don't want to analyze it yourself, let me know – I think I can find someone in need of a data fix!

Applied H.R.M. Research

Just a reminder that IPMAAC and Radford University are sponsoring an on-line journal called Applied H.R.M. Research. Please visit the journal site and read the articles and consider submitting an article yourself. There is a link to the journal on the IPMAAC website or you can go directly to the site at www.radford.edu/~applyhrm.

HR Humor

A magazine recently ran a “Dilbert Quotes” contest. They were looking for people to submit quotes from their real life Dilbert-type managers. Here are some of those quotes.

- As of tomorrow, employees will only be able to access the building using individual security cards. Pictures will be taken next Wednesday and employees will receive their cards in two weeks. (This was the winning quote from Fred Dales at Microsoft Corp. in Redmond, WA.)
- What I need is an exact list of specific unknown problems we might encounter. (Lykes Lines Shipping)
- E-mail is not to be used to pass on information or data. It should be used only for company business. (Accounting manager, Electric Boat Company)
- This project is so important, we can't let things that are more important interfere with it. (Advertising/Marketing manager, United Parcel Service)
- Doing it right is no excuse for not meeting the schedule. (Plant manager, Delco Corporation)
- No one will believe you solved this problem in one day! We've been working on it for months. Now, go act busy for a few weeks and I'll let you know when it's time to tell them. (R&D supervisor, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing/3M Corp.)
- Teamwork is a lot of people doing what I say. (Marketing executive, Citrix Corporation)
- We recently received a memo from senior management saying, “This is to inform you that a memo will be issued today regarding the subject mentioned above.” (Microsoft, Legal Affairs Division)
- My sister passed away and her funeral was scheduled for Monday. When I told my Boss, he said she died on purpose so that I would have to miss work on the busiest day of the year. He then asked if we could change her burial to Friday. He said, “That would be better for me.” (Shipping executive, FTD Florists)
- We know that communication is a problem, but the company is not going to discuss it with the employees. (Switching supervisor, AT&T Long Lines Division)
- One day my Boss asked me to submit a status report to him concerning a project I was working on. I asked him if tomorrow would be soon enough. He said, “If I wanted it tomorrow, I would have waited until tomorrow to ask for it!” (New business manager, Hallmark Greeting Cards)
- As director of communications, I was asked to prepare a memo reviewing our company's training programs and materials. In the body of the memo one of the sentences mentioned the “pedagogical approach” used by one of the training manuals. The day after I routed the memo to the executive committee, I was called into the HR Director's office, and was told that the executive VP wanted me out of the building by lunch. When I asked why, I was told that she wouldn't stand for “perverts” (pedophiles?) working in her company. Finally he showed me her copy of the memo, with her demand that I be fired, with the word “pedagogical” circled in red. The HR Manager was fairly reasonable, and once he looked the word up in his dictionary and made a copy of the definition to send to my boss, he told me not to worry. He would take care of it. Two days later a memo to the entire staff came out, directing us that no words which could not be found in the local Sunday newspaper could be used in company memos. A month later, I resigned. In accordance with company policy, I created my resignation letter by pasting words together from the Sunday paper. (Taco Bell Corporation)
- This gem is the closing paragraph of a nationally-circulated memo from a large communications company: “Lucent Technologies is endeavorily determined to promote constant attention on current procedures of transacting business focusing emphasis on innovative ways to better, if not supersede, the expectations of quality!”
- Am I the only one around here with half a brain?
- Are we paying you enough money?
- How long is this Beta guy going to keep testing our stuff? (Programming intern, Microsoft IIS Development team)—ACN