

Maximizing the Benefits of Your Pre-Hire Fitness for Duty Testing

Our clients tell us that one of the most valuable things we do is to help them track the outcomes of their pre-hire testing programs. After all, how do you know if your testing is reducing injuries and work comp costs if you don't periodically evaluate the before and after picture?

If the program is producing the desired results, we all celebrate! If not, ErgoScience helps our clients improve the testing or address other issues to more effectively reduce injuries. The data provides a wealth of information!

Because of this practice of monitoring outcomes, ErgoScience has a **lot** of data demonstrating the effectiveness of pre-hire Physical Abilities/Fitness for Duty Testing programs in a variety of industries. And 9.5 times out of 10 – the program shows that workers compensation costs are decreased by at least 30-40% within the first year of testing and sometimes those decreases get close to 90%!

Doesn't sound feasible, does it? But think about it. If you're not doing pre-hire Physical Abilities Testing, at least 10% of those you hire really don't have the physical ability to do the job. They're either not strong enough, flexible enough, or perhaps don't have the cardio fitness for the job. And those 10% will create up to 80% of your injury costs among new hires.

The improvement we see, ranges from 30% to 90%. That's a big range. So, what are the 90% companies doing compared to the 30% companies? It turns out there are 4 key things that can turn 30% savings into 70, 80, or 90% savings:

The Four Habits of Successful Physical Abilities Testing

1. Test to the maximum requirements of the job.
2. Conduct return-to-work testing as well as pre-hire testing.
3. Implement the testing program consistently.
4. Periodically re-evaluate the physical demands of the job.

Test to the maximum requirements of the job. Of all the things that affect work comp savings and ROI with a pre-hire Physical Abilities Testing Program, setting the passing criteria to be consistent with the maximum requirements of the job probably has greatest influence on the effectiveness of the program. And most of our clients intend to do just that. But when they see the physical difficulty of their jobs, they realize it will be challenging to hire folks with those kinds of abilities. No surprise. That's why they're seeing injuries in the first place.

What to do? The best practice is to lower the physical requirements of the job through ergonomic engineering modifications – eliminate or substitute the process that requires the heavy lifting; place material to be handled in the ergonomic "golden zone" (mid-chest to mid-thigh) so that it's more easily accessible, use mechanical lift assists. Unfortunately, when none of these are feasible or expedient,

many companies default to mandating the lift as a two-person operation. The passing criteria are lowered to the weight needed for a 2-person lift.

I say “unfortunately” because despite 2-person lifts being mandated, they rarely happen. People are busy and have productivity pressure. No one wants to appear “weak.” The result: two-person lifts rarely happen in the real world and people get injured. Costs go up. ROI decreases. It’s a predictable domino reaction to artificially lowering test requirements.

ErgoScience recommends that for maximum injury prevention and savings, set the passing criteria at the REAL requirements of the job. Even if your fail rate on the test is slightly higher, you’ll realize a significantly greater work comp savings by testing to the maximum essential requirements of the job.

Conduct return to work testing as well as pre-hire testing. When you really think about it, this one is a no-brainer. When the doctor releases a patient to return to work, all he/she is saying is that their patient is *medically* ready to go back. In reality, the doctor has no idea whether the patient has the physical ability to do the job.

Even if the doctor has seen a detailed job description, (which is rare) they haven’t tested the patient’s ability to perform the most difficult parts of that job. The decision to send them back to work is, in reality, a crap shoot. Sometimes it works out. But sometimes it doesn’t and the patient ends up exacerbating the original injury or injuring another body part that is trying to compensate for the original injury.

So, it’s not surprising that our employer clients who do return-to-work or fitness for duty testing after an injury, illness or prolonged work absence experience significantly greater work comp savings than those who do PAT alone.

Implement the testing program consistently. When applicants fail, rescind the offer. When applicants pass, they get hired. This one may sound like a no-brainer but for many employers, it’s easier to do in theory than in practice. They may test for a period of time, being very consistent.

However, along comes Billy Bob. He’s been working in the industry for many years and is good friends with the boss’s brother. The boss is excited to have him apply and just knows he’s perfect for the job...except he isn’t. He fails the pre-hire Physical Abilities Test. Now Boss is unhappy and screams: “What kind of #%*@ test is this anyway?”

The answer typically is: “Well Boss, it’s a good test – a very good test. One that is going to save you nearly \$100K in work comp costs because Billy Bob doesn’t really have the strength to do the job. His former jobs were a lot easier and he’s had a previous back surgery that’s left him weak.”

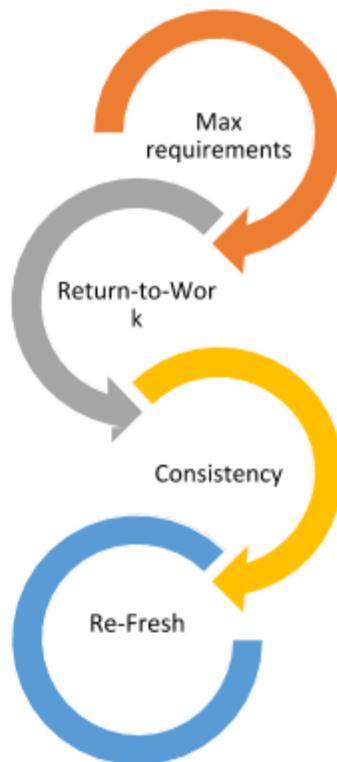
When Boss listens to the test and treats Billy Bob the same way he’s treated the last 10 people who have failed by rescinding the offer, the test does its job, work comp costs are averted and ROI is enhanced. When he ignores test results and hires Billy Bob anyway, not only is he violating the EEOC, he is creating a boatload of work comp costs for himself when Billy Bob shows up on his OSHA logs a few weeks or months later. Don’t be that kind of Boss.

Periodically re-evaluate the physical demands of the job. Change is inevitable. Jobs are no exception. And change isn’t always for the better. Take the example of a job that requires handling car

parts. As cars get bigger, car parts get bigger and heavier. The job analysis performed when the parts were smaller are no longer accurate...except no one is really paying attention to that change. **Unless**, the company or testing vendor is periodically revisiting and updating these job analyses.

Periodic re-analysis of the physical requirements of the job is essential in order to maintain EEOC and ADA compliance of pre-hire Physical Abilities Testing AND to make sure that you're testing to the maximum demands of the job. All programs need a periodic re-fresh and pre-hire Physical Abilities Testing is no exception.

Join the 90% club. Being in the 90th percentile in terms of reducing work comp costs with pre-hire testing is not that difficult. Just remember the 4 basic habits...



If you're going to test, do it right, get the best results and the best ROI!