

Brinker International Improves Succession Planning and Leadership Development by Integrating Assessment Tools

From Chili's® Grill & Bar to Magiano's Little Italy® to On The Border Mexican Grill and Cantina®, mouth-watering Brinker International® cuisine delights customers around the globe. One of the world's leaders in casual dining, Brinker has grown dramatically since its beginnings in 1975. The small restaurant in Dallas that started as Chili's Grill & Bar has now expanded to more than 1,600 restaurants across 25 countries.



Brinker hires and develops people with a passion for hospitality who give guests a warm welcome and a positive, enjoyable dining experience. Employee development is taken seriously, and Brinker often prefers to promote from within. Brinker emphasizes efficiency, a proactive approach and state-of-the-art processes in succession planning and the development of its leaders.

Need to Accelerate Succession and Place Talent in Critical Roles

Brinker experienced rapid domestic growth in 2004. The company's strategy was to quickly speed the expansion of its brands. "Whenever you build five or six restaurants, you have to have an area director to supervise them," said Stan Fletcher, vice president of Executive Development and Succession Planning at Brinker. "We were growing regional directors from the area director pool. We needed to identify talent in the organization who could take on the challenges of growth."

Brinker sought assessment tools to complement its existing processes by helping uncover and rapidly develop potential. "One purpose of any succession management process is to make it as objective as possible, so you're looking at talent the same way on the east coast as you are on the west coast," Stan said. Directorships across Brinker's three brands had similar job functions, but there was no common method for identifying talent and placing directors where they were most needed. Assessments would provide the desired objectivity, consistency and insight.

Online Assessments: Meeting Current Needs and Providing Ongoing Value

Of the assessment vendors Stan and his team interviewed, Brinker recognized that **Assess Systems** could best meet its needs. **Assess Systems** stood out for its tools, service and the professionalism of its experts. "One of their key core competencies was their online application of their psychometric tools. We could evaluate numerous people all over the country," Stan said. "**Assess Systems** also had the level of service and support we needed. I had worked with some of their principals over time and had a good relationship with them, and they had a good relationship with our organization."

Not only could Brinker leverage assessments to objectively evaluate the bench strength of existing leaders, but the company could also use the assessments as a validated tool for hiring in the future.

Measurement of Potential to Help Provide Accurate Nine-Box Data

Assess Systems started by administering assessments to approximately 200 of Brinker's succession candidates and creating summaries of each person's potential. These were used in calibration meetings to determine candidates' positions on the nine-box grid plotting performance and potential—performance being observable behaviors, and potential the innate capabilities not easily observed. These capabilities were indicators of how readily a candidate could display key competencies in a new position in the future.

“Creating the competency models for each position and using **Assess** to evaluate against those models helped us to look at potential in a different way. The **Assess** instrument can help identify what potential experiences someone needs to help them in their development,” Stan said. He noted that **Assess** is a valuable part of development when combined with experiential job-related tasks Brinker incorporated into individuals’ development plans. The assessments confirmed many of Brinker’s choices for succession and also provided insights into weak areas in individuals whom Brinker had considered ready.

Assessments for Leadership Development and Manager Selection

With succession-planning assessments in place, Brinker requested assessments for leadership development. **Assess** became a pivotal tool for providing insight into common areas of concern for leaders. “It can help you develop targeted programs,” Stan stated. “If you see a deficiency or gaps, it’s helpful there. It’s also helpful for individual developmental planning around someone’s leadership development needs, around making sure you’re challenging leaders in their development plan, and around job activities or experiences or even targeted development courses to help accelerate progress. It’s very useful.”

Brinker used data from **Assess** to create a unique development plan for each leader. **Assess Systems** helped implement 360s within Brinker’s leadership development workshops, partnered to deliver constructive development feedback to executives and trained Brinker’s development team to provide development feedback at lower levels of the organization.

The assessments carried such an impact that Brinker further expanded their use. “We started using **Assess** in the selection process for new managers coming into the organization,” said Stan. “That’s testimony to our belief in its ability to predict future performance. We believe in the value **Assess** brings to us not only in identifying and helping us develop talent but also in helping us select new talent as well.”

Competencies and Assessment Tools Integrated Across the Business

Developing talent internally so individuals can grow their careers is one of Brinker’s goals, and **Assess Systems’** tools serve that purpose well. Brinker also leverages competency models and assessments across the organization by integrating them into talent management processes. Brinker’s talent management team fully embraced the assessments from the start and strongly supports their use.

Stan values the close business relationship Brinker has with **Assess Systems**. “They have very good service. Whenever we asked them for support or to come in to explain or facilitate something, they’ve always been there for us,” he said. Stan had worked in other business contexts with two of the **Assess Systems** consultants for years. “They’re top-notch in my book,” he noted. “They’re very, very responsive and customer-friendly, customer-focused.”



Providing selection and development solutions to organizations for over 25 years