



How The Winn-Dixie Company and MHS Redefined Talent Selection with the PeopleFirst™ Inventory Assessment

Talent strategy should go beyond traditional benchmarks—it should prioritize integrity, service and character.

The Winn-Dixie Company, requiring a solution to its talent selection process, partnered with Multi-Health Systems to redefine what it means to acquire the appropriate candidate. In its first year, the program that integrated MHS' PeopleFirst™ Inventory, improved hiring quality and culture, yielding results like a 21% reduction in turnover, 51% fewer workplace-violence cases, among other benefits to date.

21%

**Reduction
in turnover**

51%

**Decrease
in workplace
violence**

21%

**Reduction
in internal
theft losses**

14%

**Reduction
in workers'
comp claims**



More stats on Page 4!

In today's competitive retail environment, The Winn-Dixie Company (TWDC) recognized a strategic imperative: to elevate workplace safety, enhance customer service, and align hiring practices with core company values. Partnering with Multi-Health Systems (MHS), TWDC implemented the PeopleFirst™ Inventory (PFI)—a scientifically validated, behavior-based pre-employment assessment. The result: a measurable transformation in workforce quality, cultural alignment, and operational efficiency, including a significant return on investment (ROI) in turnover-related costs. These efforts were championed through collaborative engagement from TWDC's Asset Protection (AP) and Human Resources (HR), while working cross-functionally with Operations, to ensure that the true impact that could be felt at the store level.



The challenge: Aligning talent with culture and safety

TWDC is one of the largest grocery and liquor store chains in the United States, with banners like Winn-Dixie and Harveys Supermarket wholly under its operation. With a firmly grounded 100-year legacy and thousands of associates serving millions of customers, TWDC saw an increasing responsibility to hire associates who align with its values of integrity, service, and commitment to being the most preferred grocer in the neighborhood - all while also meeting its organizational need for a continued safe work environment. To address this need, **TWDC embarked on a partnership with MHS to implement the PFI, a scientifically validated and legally compliant pre-employment screening tool to assess and identify trustworthy, service-oriented applicants through enhancements in talent selection.** After one full year of implementation (July 2023–July 2024), the results are not only measurable, but transformative— leading to candidates who could strengthen company culture, lower turnover, reduce shrink and fraud, and improve safety for both customers and their workforce.

“We are in the people business; we just happen to sell groceries.”

ANTHONY HUCKER, CHAIR, CEO AND PRESIDENT, TWDC



The collaborative solution: A cross-functional playbook to predictive hiring

TWDC sought a solution provider to refine its talent selection strategy, where finding candidates who demonstrate strong customer service, uphold safety, and embody a shared commitment to the company and its customers would be the key markers of business success. Traditional screening methods like criminal background checks, unfortunately, did not provide enough insight beyond an applicant’s history or past actions, and exclude behavioral characteristics suitable for long-term retention and growth outcomes. In recognizing the need for a more sustainable and effective hiring model, TWDC, in collaboration with MHS, would draw on recommendations from key internal business units like AP, HR, IT, Legal, and Operations to align on data, compliance, and adoption of the PFI. Together, they could:

- **Identify high-risk candidates** before hiring,
- **Enhance candidate selection** by focusing on integrity, service-oriented mindset, and dependability,
- **Reduce store turnover** with higher quality associates who want to stay longer,
- **Reduce workplace violence** by screening for non-violent behaviors and workplace safety,
- **Improve hiring efficiency** by using the PFI’s clear Recommended/Not Recommended designation to cut unnecessary interviews while maintaining selection quality.

NOTE: The PeopleFirst Inventory (PFI) adheres to all Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines

The Solution: A predictive Character Matrix

TWDC partnered with MHS to pilot and implement the PFI talent evaluation tool as part of its pre-employment screening for particular store positions across all of TWDC's retail stores. This tool integrates behavioral science and a comprehensive assessment model to better evaluate candidate suitability. Through the PFI, TWDC adopted a test-and-learn strategy led by a cross-functional committee, aligning with broader programs like workplace safety and HR. The adoption of the Character Matrix provided clear feedback on key traits such as dependability, integrity, customer service, and productivity—all critical qualities that had to be measurable for TWDC to assess success effectively.

KEY PFI FEATURES:



- **Scientifically validated:** Developed using evidence-based research to measure integrity, customer service orientation, and workplace safety awareness.



- **Dual approach:** Assesses both talent-oriented metrics (service, dependability, productivity) and risk-oriented behaviors (theft, workplace violence, rule-breaking).



- **Seamless integration:** Implemented within TWDC's applicant tracking system for a positive applicant experience and real-time hiring decisions.



- **Brief:** Consists of 62 items and takes under 15 minutes to complete.



- **Immediate hiring recommendations:** Provides a clear "Recommended" or "Not Recommended" designation, allowing hiring managers to act quickly.



A one-year turnaround



1. IMPROVEMENTS IN HIRING QUALITY AND TURNOVER REDUCTION

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the cost of replacing an employee can range from 50% to 200% of their annual salary, depending on their level.¹

- **The PFI led to a 21% reduction in associate turnover**, saving TWDC substantial hiring and training costs. While this is a significant improvement and TWDC does contribute the PFI as a driving factor, it is important to note that some of this performance is market-driven. Turnover in retail has generally improved globally from the highs of the “great resignation” driven by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021).

“Reducing turnover isn’t just about filling positions more efficiently—it’s about building a stable, engaged team that drives long-term success. With the PFI, we’ve been able to identify candidates who are not only qualified, but also committed to our values and culture. TWDC has been thankful for the positive impact that the PFI has had on our retention.”

KELSEY HAWKINS, SPHR

SENIOR DIRECTOR, TALENT ATTRACTION & PAY ADVISOR, EMERGING LEADERS, TWDC



2. REDUCTION IN WORKPLACE VIOLENCE INCIDENTS AND WORKERS’ COMPENSATION CLAIM

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Safety Council (NSC) both estimate the average cost of workplace injury at \$40,000.²

- **The PFI led to a 51% decrease in workplace violence cases** involving an TWDC associate.
- **The PFI led to a 14% reduction in workers’ compensation claims** at the store level.

“PFI has provided a tool that has reduced workplace incidents. The ability to identify risk before hiring is invaluable to help protect our associates and customers.”

TIM MURFIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF ASSET PROTECTION, TWDC



3. PROGRESS WITH INTEGRITY-RELATED INCIDENT REPORTING

Shrinkage, particularly employee theft, represents a significant financial drain on many organizations. Recent data reveals that employee theft and shrinkage (i.e., cash, inventory, time [overreported hours], supplies, and even confidential data) account for approximately 30% of business bankruptcies³; losses attributed to employee theft increased by 8% in 2024.³

- **The PFI contributed to a 9% reduction in theft-related shrinkage.**
- **The PFI led to a 105% increase in potential theft/fraud reporting**, empowering associates to uphold company integrity.
- **The PFI led to a 21% total reduction in internal theft losses.**

4. BETTER CUSTOMER SERVICE

- **Meaningful improvement in staff friendliness scores** (OSAT), enhancing customer experience.

¹Dyerly, R. (2025, January 21). The myth of replaceability: Preparing for the loss of key employees. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/executive-network/insights/myth-replaceability-preparing-loss-key-employees>

²OSHA Education School. (2025, September 22). Top 10 industries with highest OSHA injury rates (2024). OSHA Education School. <https://blog.oshaeducationschool.com/industries-highest-osh-injury-rates/>

³Uyar, O. (2024, October 11). Employee theft statistics for 2025. Metrobi. <https://metrobi.com/blog/employee-theft-statistics-for-2025/>

Driving cultural change through strategic hiring

Beyond operational gains, the PFI program catalyzed a cultural shift at TWDC. By embedding values like non-violence, integrity, and service into the hiring process, TWDC fostered a safer, more engaged workforce. This transformation was reinforced through onboarding, training, and leadership communication.

Collaboration in action: How TWDC and MHS worked together

The success of the PFI rollout was driven by deep collaboration:

- **AP ensured alignment with safety goals**
- **HR and Operations co-led training and adoption & ongoing program support**
- **IT enabled seamless system integration**
- **MHS provided strategic consultation and ongoing support**



This cross-functional partnership ensured the solution was not only implemented effectively, but embraced across the organization.

“TWDC’s commitment to build a collaborative Talent Acquisition strategy by introducing evidence-based hiring practices has set a new industry standard. TWDC’s success is a testament to how behavioral science can transform talent selection and risk mitigation.”

ERIC HUTCHISON, GLOBAL TALENT SOLUTIONS MANAGER, MHS



Lessons in brand protection

A critical but often overlooked benefit of using the PFI for pre-employment screening is its role in protecting TWDC’s brand reputation, which was a large focus for all internal TWDC teams involved. Each workplace violence incident, particularly those that become public, can damage customer trust, create negative media coverage, and harm the company’s ability to attract top talent.

By preventing and reducing the number of incidents, TWDC protected its brand from potential damage—a significant contribution to the overall ROI that extends beyond direct operational savings.

TWDC’s successful implementation revealed several key insights applicable to other organizations:

1. Identifying an executive sponsor was critical to the success of the project.
2. **Cross-functional collaboration is essential:** Asset Protection, HR, IT, and Operations must work in concert for optimal results.
3. **Manager buy-in determines success:** Training and awareness of “the why” by providing a clear demonstration of value are critical for adoption.
4. **Continuous monitoring ensures compliance:** Regular review and statistical measurement help maintain EEOC compliance and assessment effectiveness.
5. **Communication drives candidate experience:** Clear explanation of the assessment purpose improves applicant perception and completion rates.
6. **Highlight and share wins regularly:** Keeping the team informed about successes during both the pilot and implementation phases ensures sustained momentum, encourages valuable feedback, and builds continued support for future improvements, such as refining the assessment scales.

The cultural shift: Building a value-driven workplace

The results of the PFI program demonstrate its potential not only as a practical tool for improving workforce metrics but also as a catalyst for cultural transformation. The reduction in workplace violence and a decrease in turnover reflect a growing alignment between associate behaviors and corporate values such as non-violence, integrity, and commitment.

TWDC has successfully leveraged the PFI program to strengthen its commitment to continuously improving on an already safe and respectful workplace. By communicating this value during recruitment, onboarding, and ongoing associate development, the company has fostered a culture where non-violence is a cornerstone of associate behavior.

TWDC is proud of where they have come with the PFI program and are now entering the next phase, which involves modifying particular scales behind scientific research, to ensure that the assessment is operating at its highest potential with the greatest positive impact on the company as possible.



A model to hire by

Through cross-functional collaboration across business units and a seamless PFI integration, TWDC was able to revolutionize its hiring process, which ultimately led to greater safety, stronger talent acquisition, and reduced turnover. This program demonstrates how the scientifically validated PFI, leaning into the power of behavioral science and data-driven assessments, can outperform traditional hiring methods like stand-alone background checks and/or interviews. As TWDC continues to refine and expand its use of PFI, it sets a new standard for talent selection and workplace safety in the retail industry.

Looking ahead: The next evolution in talent selection



MHS has developed and introduced a comparable assessment to build on the success of the PFI: **The TalentFirst™ Inventory (TFI)**, which is commercially available for purchase today. The TFI offers the same compelling Character Matrix that evaluates productive and counterproductive attributes with the ability to predict workplace behaviors and help employers hire with confidence.



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