

Pleased to meet you. You're hired!

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Last November, Tom Kouri tried to fill a graphic designer opening in a hurry. At a three-hour speed-interviewing event held by Youth Employment Services Montreal, he and 39 other business leaders heard three-minute speeches from 40 job seekers and met with three for brief personal interviews.

Kouri, the CEO of High-Touch Communications Inc., a Montreal-based branding firm with eight staff, didn't hire on the spot — he later realized that the job description he'd submitted was not detailed enough. But he loved the concept, having made contacts that led to a hire and landed him a new client. "It's fantastic," says Kouri. "We live in a convenience-based society, and this is the ultimate in convenience."

He can thank time-starved, lonely people for his positive experience: they're the ones who gave speed dating its legs, and now the concept is being borrowed by human resources practitioners. Speed interviewing involves running through numerous applicants in 10- to 15-minute interview blocks; it's based on the fact that we all make up our minds about someone in seconds anyway. Large companies such as RONA and Vidéotron have used it recently to add dozens to the payroll at once. "It's being used more and at many different levels," says Tim Cork, president of NEXCareer, a career transition consultancy in Toronto. "You can move people through efficiently and do comparison shopping."

If you'd like to adopt speed interviewing at your firm, Cork suggests compiling a three-person panel to see interviewees in rapid succession. Be sure to draft a set of standard questions and a candidate scorecard in advance, which will help you focus on key questions and give each candidate a fair shake in the time allowed.

But before you rush off to interview 16 candidates for your CFO opening before lunchtime, understand that speed interviewing suits entry-level jobs where a hiring mistake is less costly, and positions for which people skills are important—because charisma is about all a candidate has time to display. Jobs demanding more than likeability and cultural fit require more due diligence than speed interviewing allows. No matter what the position, try to invite the most promising candidates back for a longer chat later. In business, as in love, you wouldn't want to pop the question after only the first date.