



WHEN YOU NEED TO FILL A CRITICAL POSITION

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# INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS TO IMPROVE HIRING EFFICIENCY

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## **THE VALUE OF A GOOD HIRE**

It's been estimated that a top performer is 8-10 times more effective in their role as an average performer, but that average and low performers make up a vast majority of the job candidates out there. Some of them put on a great "performance" when they interview while some of the top producers are not very good at interviewing. An outgoing personality with a lot of positive energy may make for an interesting interview, but it doesn't predict success on the job. That also means that a more reserved or quiet person does not predict a strong work ethic, or the ability to get the job done. So how do you determine which type of person you are talking to during an interview?

## **THE VALUE OF AN EFFECTIVE INTERVIEW**

In my 12+ years as a specialty recruiter, one of the key things I've learned is to ask the right questions and dig into the details. Whether I'm talking to a hiring manager, HR manager, or to a potential job candidate for one of my client companies, I am actually conducting an interview of needs, abilities, motivations and personalities. I need to gather this information in order to determine which job candidates will fill my client company's needs, and to determine which companies my job candidates will excel in. By improving this skill, it made my efficiency rate go way up in the following ways:

- Nearly 80% of the people I submit for jobs are asked in for an interview (showing that I'm on target for what the company's needs).
- Over 90% of the offers my client company companies extend are accepted, and the person shows up on day one (showing that it was a good fit for the job seeker too).

How does this relate to you? Remember how much time was spent managing a bad hire, and how easy it was to manage a top performer? If you could improve the efficiency of your interviews, you would drastically reduce the chance of a bad hire and make your life a whole lot easier.

## **PLANNING YOUR INTERVIEW**

Top performers are usually pretty smart people. Just as you make a determination about a potential new employee being a good addition to the team, top performers also make those judgments about a potential employer. If you conduct a weak interview, it tells the job candidate the company or hiring manager may not be very thorough or have a clear idea of what they need. Remember, it's not the job seeker's job to tell you the information you need to choose a new employee, it's YOU that is responsible for getting the information you need from the job seeker.

So how do you do it? If you start your interviews off with "So, tell me about yourself", you are basically handing control of the interview over to the job candidate. You will also find that you will waste a significant amount of the allotted interview time hearing about things that are irrelevant.

Start with your job description. I see a lot of job descriptions that are full of all kinds of information and a list of qualifications that may actually screen out a very good job candidate. Having a certain degree or number of years of experience is NOT what is needed to succeed. Experience doing what you need done and doing it successfully is what you need.

The first step is to determine what the priorities are for the first 6-12 months for the person filling the position. If you can define the major objectives this person needs to accomplish, and build a series of questions around that, you are well on your way to making a better choice.

## **SOME KEY QUESTIONS**

There are two main questions that will tell you a lot about a job candidate, and what they are capable of doing. By following these up with some “detail” questions you can tell if you’re dealing with a top performer, or someone giving a “performance”.

Key Question 1 – Ask the job candidate to describe their most significant accomplishment or project they are most proud of. By doing this you will get a really good insight into what the job candidate has done in the past and what they consider “significant”. But if you leave it at that you may not get the whole picture. You also have to follow up with detail questions like:

- What was the outcome of the project?
- What was your specific role in the project?
- Who else was involved in the project or team?
- What sort of hurdles did you encounter?
- How did you overcome them?
- What did you learn from that project?

... and any other questions you feel will give you specific insight into what’s really important. **DO NOT SETTLE FOR VAGUE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS.** The proof is in the details. A top performer can answer all of these questions pretty easily; however, a person putting on a performance will have a difficult time coming up with specifics if they haven’t done it before.

Key Question 2 - Another good “information grabber” is to describe an important project you are working on and ask the job candidate to describe in detail what they have done that is similar. Then, again, follow it up with the detail questions.

## **DON’T LET YOUR JUDGEMENT GET SWAYED**

It is very easy and common in a less structured interview to let your first impressions bias the outcome of your interview. If you really hit it off with the job candidate you may start asking questions that only confirm your first impression, but don’t give you a true picture. Conversely, someone that perhaps doesn’t make the best first impression may be exactly the person you need to be successful in the job.

There have been a number of times when I first started recruiting that I interviewed someone and thought “Wow, they sound great” and submitted them to a client company to interview, only to have them pick this person apart. There were also times when I thought a person was somewhat dull, but later found they had won awards for exemplary work, or that have gone on to companies and done extremely well. By waiting until the END of the interview to form an impression about the job seeker’s fit for the job, you can take out the emotional biases and make much better choices.

## **THE ADVANTAGES TO THIS TYPE OF INTERVIEWING**

Start by determining the main objectives of the position, and what the person needs to accomplish (not qualifications they “need” to have). Then determining the questions becomes much easier. Also make sure the entire interview team is on the same page, and help them develop relevant questions as well. When you have the team feedback meeting after the interview, you will have more concrete information to use in making your selection.

You should also hold each interviewer accountable for detailed feedback. Don't accept, "I don't think they would fit in very well, so I vote NO," as an answer. Make sure that a NO vote is as justified as a YES vote, and carries the same amount of weight. It's not that difficult to do, but it can sure make a big difference in the quality of your new hires, and takes a lot of fear out of making a bad hire.

By having a consistent approach to the interview you will improve your objectivity when evaluating the job candidates, you will make more consistent hiring decisions, and you will actually increase the company's legal protection during the interview process by having a standard set of questions for each job candidate.

If you would like a copy of the list of questions I use when getting a profile from a new job candidate, let me know. I would be happy to share them with you and answer any questions you might have. My goal is to not just be a recruiter to my client companies, but to be a resource for them too.

**Jeff King**

Recruiter/President, PPS