

The 6 “BE’s” of Interviewing

What activity is least liked by many of today’s Managers?
What activity, if done correctly, consistently leads to a more productive company?

Interviewing

How is it that something so unpopular can also be so crucial to your company’s performance? Companies spend a great deal of time and money training their employees on everything from SOX to the proper way to complete a timecard. They provide continuing education to ensure ongoing compliance with the laws governing their industry. The more progressive organizations cross-train their staff in order to provide them with a wider range of skills, guaranteeing the availability of additional expertise during crunch time. Yet very few companies train their hiring managers on the most effective methods of interviewing prospective employees!

It is no surprise that so many managers dislike the hiring process. No one enjoys being responsible for something for which they have no training.

After 10 years of recruiting and 15 years hiring and managing staff, I have come to the conclusion that *effective interviewing ultimately hinges on 6 key components, regardless of your status as a candidate or a hiring manager.*

The 6 “BE’s” of Effective Interviewing

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. BE Prepared | 4. BE Specific & Cite Real Examples |
| 2. BE A Good Listener | 5. BE Energetic & Enthusiastic |
| 3. BE Inquisitive | 6. BE Yourself |

BE Prepared

Whether you are a hiring manager or a job seeker, preparing for an interview is of the utmost importance. With the amount of information available on the internet, candidates can uncover a variety of intelligence regarding a company’s business strategy, their latest press releases, and in some cases, details about their management team. As a hiring manager, it is important that you spend time reviewing the position, the skills you are seeking, the long term opportunities, and the current culture of your department. Perhaps there are some technical gaps in the group or the team needs a high energy professional to provide balance to the other personalities. It is also your duty to review the candidate’s resume prior to the interview – and 10 minutes before they walk through your door will not suffice! I have experienced many failed interviews resulting from a simple lack of preparation. The biggest surprise for any candidate is an interviewer that has obviously failed to review the candidate’s credentials. In some cases, the interviewer is completely unaware of the position for which the candidate is interviewing! Likewise, there is nothing more unimpressive to a hiring manager than a candidate who has failed to read the job description or who lacks an understanding of the company’s core business

BE a Good Listener

While it is important for both the candidate and hiring manager to listen carefully – especially during the first round of interviews - it is *imperative* that the hiring manager spend 75%-80% of his time listening. I am amazed when candidates tell me they are unsure whether they are a good fit because they spent the entire interview listening to the interviewer talk about himself. How can

the hiring manager identify candidates that possess the right combination of skills and personality if he has not asked any questions during the interview? The only thing less effective is a hiring manager that constantly checks email, accepts phone calls, reads other documents, or in some way fails to focus on the candidate's responses. As a candidate, one of the worst offenses you can commit is constantly interrupting the interviewer. Not only does this demonstrate your lack of listening skills, but it also puts into question your ability to manage a team and communicate others in the company. Bring a notepad with you in order to take notes and write down your questions as they arise. Before asking a question, determine whether this is the most appropriate time. With some patience, perhaps the interviewer will answer the question on his own. Finally, *you should always leave your cell phone in the car during the interview to avoid being distracted or interrupted* - well-qualified candidates quickly lose all credibility when they accept phone calls during the interview.

BE Inquisitive

This is one of the most obvious components of an effective interview, yet it is often underutilized. Having read the job description (candidate) and the resume (hiring manager), both individuals arrive at the interview with a very basic and purely academic understanding of the other – nothing more. In-person interviews provide both parties with an opportunity to discuss the true substance of the position. The candidate is able to discover the company's culture, the long-term prospects for growth, the day to day activities, the hiring manager's expectations, the manager's work ethic and work style, and the makeup and tenure of the department. Likewise, the hiring manager is able to delve into nearly every aspect of the candidate's skills and talents including: her decision making skills, her specific accomplishments and direct contributions to the company, her ability to multi-task, her ability to work in a team culture, her motivation, her ideal work environment, her technical capabilities, her communication skills, her ability to think on her feet and much more. Without the proper questions, much of this substance remains a mystery – and the worst time to solve this mystery is after she starts working for your company!

BE Specific & Cite Real Examples

Hopefully, we have all heard about the current trend in screening talent: *behavioral interviewing*. This is a style of interviewing based on asking situational questions such as "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of a situation in which you..." But how many of us really know how to translate the necessary skills and personality traits into questions that will ultimately reveal whether the person is a good fit? The best way to create these questions is to work backwards. If you are tasked with replacing a great candidate who just left your team after several years of positive contributions, think about what made her successful. What issues did she face during the past year and how did she respond? What is the pace of the department? Do they work long hours on a regular basis or just at month end? How did she handle multiple tasks being thrown at her? When she did not respond well to difficult situations, what type of response would have been ideal? How did the expectations change when you made an acquisition and how was this position affected? These represent just a few examples of the situations sure to be faced by the new employee. Use them to your advantage by translating them into behavioral interviewing questions.

As a candidate, the most effective way to demonstrate your experience and showcase your talents is to provide specific examples of your accomplishments. Once again, this cannot be accomplished without properly preparing for the interview. Ideally, the examples you cited on your resume are the same examples you will use during the interview process. Be sure to outline your role in each accomplishment, the reason for your involvement, the challenges you faced and

how you overcame them. Most importantly, describe the outcome and how it benefited the team, department and company. **A word of caution: do not take credit for successes that resulted from the contributions of others!** At some point during the process, your exaggerations will be discovered!

BE Energetic & Enthusiastic

A positive attitude and an enthusiastic demeanor cannot guarantee you a job for which you are under qualified. However, you will almost certainly *lose a job that you are qualified for if you fail to demonstrate your interest and excitement during the interview.* Throughout the screening process, the hiring manager will spend a great deal of time evaluating your culture fit in addition to your technical fit. Whether the department is high energy or low key, the hiring manager wants to hire someone that is passionate about the work he will be doing. *Caution:* This is not an invitation to be disingenuous or annoyingly happy. Rather, I am simply suggesting that if you are unable to demonstrate your interest in the position, perhaps it is not for you.

As a hiring manager attempting to attract the right professional, it is critical that you express enthusiasm for your company and your role. There have been countless situations where a candidate has decided not to pursue an opportunity because it was painfully obvious that the hiring manager was unhappy in her role. Who wants to work for someone who doesn't like what they are doing? Moreover, the hiring manager is going to have a very hard time developing and promoting her people if she constantly displays the hardships of her position and omits the positive attributes.

BE Yourself!

Last, but most important of all, Be Yourself! The only way to avoid a mismatched placement is to provide your audience with a true picture of who you are. Both employers and candidates must depict themselves in an honest fashion. (**Note: Candidates, this includes the presentation of a truthful resume*). While there is always some degree of "selling" during the interview process, you will avoid surprises and misaligned expectations *if and only if* you discuss your work style and work ethic from the very beginning. A recent survey conducted by Leadership IQ indicated that 46% of new hires fail within 18 months. Nearly 89% of these new hires left their position due to a lack of culture fit. One of the best ways in which to gauge whether there is a fit is to conduct a minimum of 3 rounds of interviews, ideally involving 3-6 employees in the process (the hiring manager, peers, subordinates, other departmental leaders, and the hiring manager's boss). Leveraging the perspective of several employees will help you avoid making an emotional hire or worse yet, turning someone down for irrelevant reasons. I have experienced several situations where the hiring manager decided not to pursue an otherwise qualified candidate simply because he reminded him of a former employee that he disliked. Ideally, the final interview should be an informal lunch, allowing the hiring manager to observe the candidate's conduct in a more casual setting. This additional meeting will provide a more realistic picture of both the candidate and the hiring manager.

The process of Interviewing and hiring new staff is not simple. Selecting the right candidate requires the consideration of many factors. In today's tight labor market, the cost of making a mistake is higher than ever before – the average cost of replacing an employee is now estimated at 1.75x – 2.75x base salary. However, by adhering to these 6 guidelines, you will eliminate much of the guess work and greatly increase your chances of making a successful hire.