

“In This Issue: Five Ways To Be Completely Bamboozled In the Interview By A Slick Applicant”

Test for Success
Tools, Tips, & Techniques for Avoiding
Hiring Mistakes and Developing People
From Helm and Associates, Inc.
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Five Ways To Be Completely Bamboozled In the Interview By A Slick Applicant

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We all like to think of ourselves as good interviewers. After all, we have a lot of relevant experience that we bring to the job of interviewer (we talk to people all day long,) we are on the high ground power-wise (we’ve observed our families at home, our coworkers, and besides we watch a lot of TV.) So, OK, bring on the applicants!

The problem is that the “qualifications” mentioned above are pretty low (right above “breathing” and “being conscious”) on the list of requirements for proficiency at interviewing.

The interview is a unique situation with highly structured, and competing, roles. The applicant’s role is to present himself in such a manner as to make a good enough impression on the interviewer that the interviewer will either off the job (if he is qualified to do so) or pass the applicant to the next stage in the selection process with a positive recommendation.

The interviewer, on the other hand, must try to get behind this “Smile, Look Good, and Say the Right Thing” façade and determine what the REAL person looks like and whether there is a good fit with the job.

The argument could be made that the applicant who prepares well and is motivated actually has the advantage in the interview. All he has to do is act the role of “Best Candidate for this Job” for the short period of time of the average interview.

Therefore, when you interview you have a tough job. And you can make it tougher if you fall into any one of the following potholes:

1. Talk a lot. Talk 80% of the time, particularly if the applicant appears reluctant to talk. Talk about yourself, your experiences with the company, etc. Talk until you run out of things to say and then terminate the interview.
2. Ask only questions that can be answered with a “Yes or “No.” These questions are nice and simple and move the interview right along. Before you know it you will be able to wrap things up and get out of there.
3. Take the applicant’s answers at face value. He wouldn’t lie, would he? Just look at him; he has an honest face and that’s good enough.
4. Avoid unpleasant or difficult subjects. Don’t make the applicant feel ill at ease by making him dwell at length on gaps in his work history or terminations from previous jobs. He obviously doesn’t want to talk about these things, so have a little respect here.
5. Cut the interview short. So, OK, you’ve talked to the applicant and he didn’t pick his nose or put his feet up on your desk. How bad can he be? Time is money; let’s shake hands and let both of us get on with our lives.

Stepping into any one of these five pot-holes will almost guarantee that you will look at your new-hire in his third week (or whenever his early employment “honeymoon period” is over) and think, “Who is this guy? He certainly doesn’t look anything like what I saw in the interview.”

If you would rather avoid hiring “problem children” the following steps can help you side-step the aforementioned potholes.

1. Make sure that you let the applicant do most of the talking. Avoid the temptation to fill up “dead air” (that is silence) with chatter about yourself, the company and it’s history, goals, or something you discover you have in common with the applicant (you went to the same college, are from the same state or hometown, or were in the same branch of the military.) You are there to learn all you can about the applicant not vice-versa.
2. Ask open-ended questions and avoid questions that can be answered “Yes” or “No.” Questions that can be answered “Yes” or “No” give the least amount of information about the applicant. So instead of asking, “Did you like working for (last job)?” ask, “What about working for (last job) did you like the most?” and then ask “What did you like the least?”

Open-ended questions allow the applicant to give answers that illustrate more of his attitudes, values, and preferences. They tell you more about the applicant than a “Yes” or “No” does.

3. Don't take the applicant's answers at face value. You want to know how the applicant feels about job-relevant issues like integrity, initiative, and more. Asking a question like, “Would you call yourself an honest person?” is in all likelihood going to get a very positive answer, but what have you learned about how the applicant really feels about how he shows integrity on the job? Not much. Instead, you could approach the subject by saying something like, “Give me an example from your last job of a difficult situation that you faced and how you dealt with it.”

4. Ask specific, but tactful, questions about any indication of improper or questionable behavior. Remember, this is not a social situation. If it were, then the proper thing to do would be to avoid awkward or difficult subjects. This is a job interview and your role is to find out about any aspect of the applicant that could be detrimental to the company. If the applicant has been terminated from a previous job, you want to know the details in order to reassure yourself that the applicant is not a risk. If the applicant has a string of short-tenured jobs, you want to know why. When you encounter a questionable aspect of the applicant's past, ask the applicant probing questions like, “Help me understand how that came about.” Or “Tell me more about that.” Some people do have less than desirable attitudes and biases. You want to know about these attitudes or biases before you make a hire decision so that you can evaluate whether or not they could have a negative impact on the company.

5. Give the interview as long as it takes to get satisfactory answers, answers that paint as complete and representative a picture of the applicant as possible. If the applicant looks promising, schedule a second interview in a different location.

The Test For Success Bottom Line: There is no such thing as the perfect interview, or interviewer, and, thank goodness, perfection is not the goal. At a minimum however, you want to be at least as well prepared as the highly motivated applicant in order to avoid being bamboozled.

Remember, People are NOT your most important asset!

The RIGHT people are!

To Hire the Best, Test!

To Reveal Management Potential, Test!

To Diagnose Problem Behavior, Test!

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