

# INTERVIEWING



“When you get right down to it there are only two things absolutely required for success as a manager. One is to hire talented people and the other is to make sure they’re motivated. If you do these two things well, the rest is a breeze. When you think about it, Colonel Potter in M\*A\*S\*H was really the ideal leader because he had both.”

– Steve Kerr, General Electric

## HIRING BELOW THE LINE

Have you ever been involved in the hiring of a person who you thought was going to be fantastic but who turned out to be a mistake? Why does this happen? The short answer is because you were interviewing for the wrong things.

Look at it this way. If we define a job candidate’s qualifications as broadly as possible it might look like the diagram on the right. The things above the water line are the visible things, usually provided on a person’s resume, that are easily discussed in the job interview. Where did the person go to school? What did they study?

Where has the person worked? What projects have they worked on? What was their title? Who do they know at the university?

## FOCUS ON COMPETENCIES

The things below the water line are called competencies. These are not as

visible and you have to work harder in the interview to get at these. Competencies include:

**Skills & Knowledge.** This refers to the abilities and useable information the person has in a particular area. A job usually requires some combination of technical ability, business ability and people or leadership ability. He looks good but can he lead a project? She looks good but can she manage a team?

**Self-Image & Social Role.** This refers to how the person sees him or herself at a functional level. Does she see herself as a leader or a follower? Does he see himself as a change agent or someone who resists change?

**Traits & Motives.** These are the enduring characteristics that describe the person as well as those things that drive his or her behavior. One person might be high on initiative. Another on being results oriented. Another might be very detail oriented or customer oriented or easy to get along with, etc.

These are what determine failure or success in the job not the things above the line. As a hiring manager, you need to interview and hire for these. Now suppose you're hiring. Here's the first question, a before-you-ever-start-recruiting-for-the-job type question:

*Do you know what competencies are needed in this job?*

**INTERVIEWING FOR COMPETENCIES**

Once you've spelled out what competencies are key for the job, then you need to structure the interview process around these competencies. This is called a behavioral event interview. The idea is to focus on key events or



instances in which the person has had to demonstrate a competency you're interested in. Try to keep your list of key competencies between four and six so you can dedicate enough time and energy to sizing up each candidate in the areas that matter most.

Remember the first question if nothing else. Tell them what you're interviewing for. Say "One of the key things we need in this job is \_\_\_\_\_. (Whatever competency you are interested in goes here). I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experience in this area. Tell me about a time when you needed to show \_\_\_\_\_." This question alone will focus your interview on key competencies rather than on the general questions you may usually ask.

Now, if you're smart you'll do two things: First, you'll ask your interview

team to help you with this. To one interviewer you'll say, "I want you to really interview this person for strategic thinking skills. Focus on that and tell me whether you think the candidate has these skills." To another you'll say, "You focus on ability to handle risk. Hammer away on this one and tell me whether they have this ability." Each interviewer will have a key competency assignment to focus their interview and to bring you back the evidence of whether they have the goods in that area.

Second, you'll use the same interview team to interview each candidate you're bringing in for the job so they can have the point of comparison on each candidate.

**THE GOOD NEWS & THE BAD NEWS**

The good news is that this is an approach to selection that will yield significantly better results in hiring and will help you avoid the kind of hiring mistakes discussed earlier.

The bad news is that this approach takes significantly greater commitment to the hiring process—both personally and organizationally—than we typically have given before.





### HIRE FOR FIT & BRING IN “A PLAYERS”

These are the twin objectives of a good hiring decision. The “fit factor” is a key issue in how long a new hire will stay with the organization.

The other objective of selection is to bring in “A players”—those with strong talent and potential who can really make a difference. “A players” have tremendous leverage on the success of your operation:

- They have significant impact on the organization’s performance
- They set high people standards for their teams
- They are able to attract, retain and develop other “A’s”
- Their hiring demonstrates BYU’s commitment to getting the right people

### TO DO LIST

- ✓ Identify the key competencies that you need to hire for in your organization. Begin to use these as a template for the kinds of questions you and your team use in the hiring process.
- ✓ Solidify a hiring team. Ask for peoples’ commitment. Getting the team’s feedback on the competencies of each candidate will be invaluable to you and will convey a strong message to the candidate about the importance of the process.
- ✓ Include the peers of the would-be hire in the process. These team members can give you good feedback on the critical issue of how the candidate will fit in with the team. Remember that the great teams—the Beatles, the Chicago Bulls, the cast of Cheers—were all great ensembles.

### COMPETENCY QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time in your work when you needed to show leadership. (initiative, strategic thinking, etc.)
- Give me an example.
- Can you walk me through the situation from the beginning?
- What were they key events along the way?
- What was your role? What did you do/say?
- Can you remember any key interaction or conversation you had in the early stages of this?
- What happened next?
- How did you handle the situation?
- What was the outcome? What happened as a result?

### THE BOTTOM LINE

As a manager, effective hiring is Job 1. There is nothing more important that you do than attracting and incorporating talent into the organization. If you think that hiring is a tactical activity, you’re wrong. Every hire you make will either make things better, worse or about the same in your organization. Every hire is a strategic hire.

