Capturing Interview Impressions

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Before you interview a candidate for a job, it's important to get a sense of who will be the right fit for the job. What's the ideal combination of experiences, training, skills, values, and personal characteristics in the perfect candidate? Don't write a treatise. Just make a list of the five to ten critical components you're seeking. It's the lens through which you'll look during the interview.

Take that list with you to the interview. Jot down notes as you hear (or don't hear) these emerge in the candidates' responses. Interviewer note-taking makes job prospects a tad more nervous, but only for a minute or so.

Just after the candidate has left, add to your notes, both plusses and minuses on each item. The hiring decision is both an objective and an emotional decision. What evidence did the person present that tells you this is the one? What's your emotional sense of how he or she will fit in the organization? Both are important. Write a brief paragraph at the end summarizing what you believe and why, and state your bottom line: Hire, don't hire. Again, the note-taking need not be formal, unless some central figure on the interviewing team is collecting group impressions and wants a typed-up summation. You are often seeing more than one hopeful for the job, and it's easy to forget important specifics. You remember 70 percent the day of the interview. You forget 70 percent by the next day.

Hiring decisions made by a group of people can be contentious. Who's right for you may not seem right for me. You can make your best case if you have your template and your observations from the interview.

To sum up: Before the candidate arrives, develop a template of the right experiences/skills/characteristics you want, take brief notes during the interview, and write your assessment and recommendation immediately afterwards.

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