

Interviewing Candidates: How To Smash The Mask

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When you interview someone for a job, you need to learn as much as you can. You want the truth. A candidate who interviews with you will want to present herself in the most favorable light. He may want to hide his truths behind an "I'm perfect" mask. What people have done in their lives tends to be a good predictor of what they'll do in the future. If you can get behind the mask to the truth, you will improve the likelihood of making a good hire.

Prepare for the Interview

1. *Have a structure/format that you memorize and rigidly follow:* "Tell me about your work background, school, and interests." Draw up a list of criteria and job duties. You'll want to match them with what the person tells you.
2. *Study the resume.*
3. *Follow this structure:* A no-brainer first question, complex opening question (so the interviewee will pay attention), with prompts as he responds.

Conducting the Interview.

1. *Have someone else ask the questions while you observe,* asking occasional questions. You see more when you're not on the interviewer hot seat.
2. *Take notes if you like.* The interviewee initially becomes more careful, but ignores it after awhile. If you don't take notes, jot down your impressions immediately afterwards.
3. *Listen with your gut.* It's your best management tool.
4. *Assume a permissive manner.* It'll bring out the information you want. Sit back, be attentive, smile, have warm eyes, use non-confrontational language, say "Hmm" approvingly, raise your eyebrows, wait nine seconds when an answer ends to see if she'll say more. Most often, interviewees just keep talking!
5. *Always keep control.* You structure the information flow (and don't let the interviewee get you to deviate). Cut off the rambling response by breaking eye contact or interrupting with a new question when he pauses for breath.
6. *Answer interviewee questions last.* If done earlier, she can intuit the "right" response and will give it to you. She'll also use up valuable time and you'll lose control.
7. *Cross the barrier.* Everyone resists exposure. Your questions, your few words, your smiles, and manner will lower the person's protective guard.

8. *Shut up and let the interviewee talk.* Interviewers talk too much.

9. *Probe.* This can't be learned from an article. If you sell, you already know how to do it. Keep your structure, follow hunches, look for experiences and behaviors that confirm whether the interviewee does or doesn't meet the items on the checklist. Be gentle about it but go after negatives. Ask what motivated him. Ask him to self-assess. If you believe he doesn't have something, like confidence, ask if he does, or would he like more of it? How does he know?

10. *Take the time.* You can do a good job in 45 minutes, a great job in 90. If you have less time, focus on getting the work and school data.

Interpret the Interview

1. *Write down your impressions immediately.* You'll remember 70 percent at that point. If you wait till next day, you'll forget 70 percent.

2. *Reflect on what you're looking for:* mental ability, motivation, and maturity. Go back to your checklist of criteria. How does the candidate measure up?

3. *Forget what you've heard about the dangers of the halo effect.* Personal fit in the organization is as important as qualifications. Don't overlook the dynamism diversity brings, but there should be a strong sense of "she'll fit here."

4. *Ask yourself questions:* What did you believe/not and why? What did you like/not? What facts/behaviors emerged? What hunches do you have and why?

You won't hit 100 percent in your hiring, but you'll definitely improve the odds of finding a great new employee.

Note: Much of this article came from a workshop on interviewing given by Richard Fear, author of the best book on the subject, *The Evaluation Interview*.

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