

Try These Unusual Tactics on Your Next Interviewee

You never get a second chance to make a first impression—especially during a job interview. According to a series of studies, conducted during the mid-1990s by Dr. Frank Bernieri, University of Toledo, an interviewer typically makes up his mind about a candidate within two seconds of seeing him. Once he's made this subconscious snap decision, he clings to it.

If this is the case, then why even bother with the interview? Has the interview become obsolete, adding little value to the hiring process? In a word, No. Responsible and professional hiring managers realize that there is too much at stake to reduce the hiring process to a mere handshake. In fact, today's job market has made the interview more critical than ever. Hiring managers must work even harder to learn more about candidates than what their résumés reveal.

According to hiring professionals, job interviews are 50% about technical skills and 50% about company fit. Beyond skills and experience, employers are looking for candidates who share company values, fit in the organization's culture and work well with company team members. So how do you identify those individuals?



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In the past, a stellar résumé, standard interview and acceptable references were enough to earn a candidate the “thumbs up.” Today, however, the chemical industry is much too competitive and people-oriented for this process to identify true star candidates. Industry employers are now looking for more effective interview methods, and some of the world's most well-known companies are showing them the way.

Take a Tip from Google

Take Google and Microsoft, for instance. In an effort to be more selective about whom they hire, these corporate giants are resorting to unusual, even wacky, interview tactics. Their goal is to learn more about a candidate's personality, behavior quirks and ability to adapt to change and stress.

For example, interviewers at Google are notorious for asking “out-there” brain teaser questions like, “How many times a day do the hands on a clock overlap?” or “You have to get from point A to point B. You don't know if you can get there. What would you do?” Most times, it's not the answer that the interviewer is interested in, but the candidate's reaction to being thrown a curveball, as well as how he goes about formulating a solution (even if it is the wrong one).

Hiring managers use several other unique interview techniques to learn more about how candidates may fit with company culture, respond to stress or solve problems. Following are a few examples.

Behavioral Interviews

In the 1970s, psychologists began to influence the field of human resources, advising companies to look beyond résumés and references to uncover clues to a candidate's behavior. The goal was to hire the person who had not only the requisite skills and experience, but also the personality traits that best fit the company's culture, mission and social structure.

To accomplish this goal, hiring managers developed questioning techniques that helped to predict a candidate's success in both job performance and corporate culture compatibility. With questions such as, “How did you handle the situation when you were confronted with a difficult co-worker?” or, “Can you give me an example of how you worked to correct a mistake you had made?” Interviewers began screening for the ability to perform gracefully under pressure, or for an easygoing manner with others. Today, behavioral questions like these are common.

Eventually, certain companies found the need to “raise the bar” to ensure they were hiring only the elite. Once again, businesses such as Google and Microsoft led the way in this transition, and today scores of organizations are following suit.

So, what constitutes an unusual interview tactic in behavioral hiring? Dr. Pierre Mornell, author of *Hiring Smart*, has a few simple suggestions that can easily be implemented in any interview. For example, he recommends ending the interview with “we've got five more minutes.” This usually prompts the can-

candidate to say the most important thing(s) about him or herself—what Mornell calls last-minute revelations—which can prove invaluable to the interviewer.

Also, Mornell suggests throwing a curveball at the end of the interview by doing the unexpected. He often walks people to their cars to observe the make, model, interior, or anything else that shows something about the candidate's personal side. Or take the candidate out to lunch—a great setting for observing behavior and personality. Better yet, ask the prospect to drive. Take note: What kind of driver is she? Aggressive? Careful? Does she follow the rules of the road?

Another simple behavior tactic: mid-interview drop a pen on the floor halfway between the person and yourself to see if he is considerate enough to pick it up or even notices the pen at all. A maneuver like this is especially appropriate when you are interviewing candidates who will work directly with clients, vendors or the media.

The Stress Interview

The stress interview is a behavior-based interview in which the hiring manager creates a tense situation or asks stressful questions (or a combination of both) to observe the candidate's reaction. For example, some interviewers will change the interview time or location at the last minute to see how well the candidate can roll with change. Or they may keep the candidate waiting for up to an hour to find out whether she keeps her composure under pressure or flies off the handle. Bonus points for the candidate who not only stays calm, but finds ways to constructively occupy her time!

Other interviewers will purposefully create tension with frowning, silence, or perhaps even a confrontational attitude (including rapid-fire questioning or criticism) to see how the candidate reacts. While it is just an act, the technique can intimidate a candidate—so use this technique with caution. Then again, if you're in search of a bulldog of a sales manager, this might be a good method

to try.

A small business owner looking to hire enthusiastic and upbeat employees, tests each candidate by greeting him in the lobby and leading the way to his office, walking briskly without stopping to talk. If the owner makes it to his chair before the candidate is even at the door, he knows that applicant doesn't have the energy he's looking for. He gives him the 10-minute courtesy interview and moves on. So far, this business owner believes the unusual stress tactic has helped him identify the kind of people he wants working for him.

Brain Teasers

Brain teasers are used more frequently in technical fields, as exemplified by giants Microsoft and Google. This interview technique is designed to demonstrate how fast the candidate can problem-solve and the thought process by which he devises a solution. Often the questions are elaborate technical tests, but sometimes they are just genius-level brainteasers, such as these Google interview questions (according to TechInterviews.com):

"You have eight balls, all of the same size. Seven weigh the same, and one weighs slightly more. How can you find the ball that is heavier by using a balance scale only twice?"

"In a country in which people only want boys, every family continues to have children until they have a boy. If they have a girl, they have another child. If they have a boy, they stop. What is the proportion of boys to girls in this country?"

(For answers to these and other Google brain teasers, go to www.techinterviews.com/?p=325)

Trick Questions

While not a new concept in the interviewing process, trick questions are becoming more common. Trick questions, like those listed below, are meant to give away more information than just the answer to the question.

1. What was the last book you've read? On the surface: Does the candidate have outside interests? Below the surface: Does he read industry trade publications or keep up with current events in the newspaper?

2. What is your favorite food/drink? On the surface: Does the candidate enjoy things outside of work—meals with family and friends for example? Below the surface: Is she an unhealthy eater or a big alcohol drinker? If so, this could mean higher insurance costs to the company.

Get creative with your interview process. Feel free to stretch the boundaries (within the law and without alienating a potential top candidate). Try an unusual interview tactic during your next round of interviews and see if it enhances your hiring process. If you are consistent in the tactics and criteria you use to rate each candidate for the same position, the process will pay off. You will find a truly talented individual who fits well in your company, and he will feel as though he has genuinely earned the position!