



Adopt a “Career Coaching” Approach to Interviewing

By Paul Falcone

Helping your front-line leaders build trust in the first few minutes of a candidate interview may sound like a daunting task but should be a lot easier to accomplish with a slight shift in their interview questioning strategies. Hiring managers often jump right into the question and answer format before giving the relationship a chance to develop. And it's more than just small talk that's at issue here . . . Getting candidates to develop a sense of trust in their interviewers stems from asking questions that focus on their longer-term career goals and aspirations - not just on the company's needs. Further, launching right into behavioral interview questions or querying their strengths and weaknesses before establishing a foundation of trust may result in a candidate giving canned and arm's length responses that reveal little about the real person behind the interviewing hype.

Share some of the following questions with your hiring managers, and see if peppering the interview with these selfless queries that focus on career introspection and candidates' longer-term career goals can help your hiring managers become more confident interviewers who get much more out of the meeting than superficial responses to canned questions. And even if your company follows a strict questioning regimen (for example, via Targeted Selection or some other well defined program), adding just a few additional questions to the beginning or end of the meeting could go a long way in getting candidates to open up and feel comfortable making themselves a bit vulnerable in a healthy sense.

For example, you'll know you've reached success and developed trust when a candidate occasionally reveals, “Well, I normally wouldn't share this in an interview, Paul, but . . .” Further, your hiring managers will have a much greater chance of determining if the individual is the right fit for the department if they can gauge whether there are compatible business styles and approaches to leadership, communication, and team camaraderie.

Open the interview by asking, “Walk me through your career progression leading me up to how you landed in your current role at your present company.” Progress to: “What's your primary reason for exploring other opportunities, and how could a role with our organization help you in terms of building your resume over the long term?” Continue with: “What are the three criteria you're using in selecting your next role, company, or industry?” and then “If you were to accept a position with us, how would you explain that to a prospective employer five years from now?”

As the hiring manager delves deeper into getting to know the real person, question, “What would your most respected critic say about your performance, and what's it's like working with you every day?” Continue with, “If you were to accept a position with us, how could I provide you with the right amount of

support, structure, and direction on a regular basis? Likewise, what could I expect from you in terms of leadership, communication, and your team orientation?”

As the interview continues, explore whether the candidate exhibits the right types of behaviors and approaches to work and communication so that the fit factor becomes more apparent. For example, ask questions like: “How much structure, direction, and feedback do you generally prefer on a day-to-day basis?” and “How many hours per week do you generally work in order to get your job done?”

Similarly, ask “What’s the best way for me to deliver constructive criticism to you?” “How do you trade off between the competing demands of speed and quality, and which takes precedent?” and “What motivates you, and is there anything that typically unwinds you or that you don’t have much patience for?” Further, these very same “fit” questions can be asked and vetted during the reference checking process to ensure the person you believe you’re interviewing is who you’re actually hiring.

Finally, a hiring manager might conclude the interview with questions like: “From a professional development standpoint, what are you focusing on at this point in your career? And while we’re at it, what would the ideal opportunity look like to you in terms of your role, responsibilities, and learning curve?” In short, move the employee development paradigm to the pre-offer stage, and help candidates evaluate your opportunity relative to their longer-term career aspirations.

Then watch your front-line leaders’ interviews become much more personal, engaging, and appreciated, especially by Millennials who are looking for a reason to connect with an organization that demonstrates open and honest communication, respect, and transparency. Building that muscle for your front-line leadership team may be as simple as providing them with a short list of alternative interviewing questions that helps them to establish trust and to bond in as little as an hour during a first-time candidate meeting.

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